Sometimes the tears just want to come out
like when some people are afraid they cannot shout
anger fills your blood stream
laughter comes out instead of a scream
but being this happy is just a dream
i am boiling inside, can you see the steam

check out the rest of Big Vic's POW on page 8

EDITOR'S NOTE VOLUME 11.32

What's new for you loyal, but few, editorial note readers! Welcome to issue 11.32. This week we have yet another wonderful guest writer to feature in this editorial note this week, but before we go there, let us say we appreciate the loyalty all you writers show to the program each week, from the writers featured in the front pages to you old school writers in the back, thank you. Like we said in the last editorial note, it is a real treat to deliver Beats to you all each week, and especially conduct the weekly workshops to those of you who have the privilege to really get to know us.

All right... allow us to hand over this computer keyboard to our guest writer, most of you may have read his stuff in The Beat this past year, but regardless, lets give him a chance to spew his realities...

Welcome, Beat readers, to my first editor's note. This is Dominic Scheer aka Scorpion taking you on a journey into the mind of a felon and an artist, with commentaries included. I remember my probation officer in Marin County Juvenile Hall, telling me about a program that he could set me up on that would enable me to transition to my freedom with a sort of "ease and finesse, "as he plainly put it. I also remember my thinking, "No way, I just got out of a program, and there is no humanly possible way to willingly get me into another one. "When he asked me what I was going to do when I got out of there, my immediate response was, PARTY! I will never forget the look of immaturity that I knew crossed my face at that time, but I am stubborn and as much as I knew he was right, I stuck with my exclamation like gorilla glue on a 2x4.

The night before my release (after a year incarcerated) I didn't sleep but a few minutes and when I woke up those obnoxious keys on my cell door. Tears came to the brim of my eyelids and threatened to spill, had I not willed them down. I was leaving and would never come back.

I went to my locker and put my old clothes on with a touch of nostalgia that I couldn't place. Walking tall, I stepped out the door and down the hall, collected my money that I had been booked with, and was free. Free. FREE!!!!

Freedom was scary. My therapist and also my chauffer for the day asked me what the most exciting thing about freedom was and I said, "I can walk fifty feet without having to turn a corner,"but I was wrong. We got into his Nissan, something or other, and we were off and driving. Now let me remind you that when you spend a whole year only going about five miles an hour at max speed, the freeway is a frightening experience. The only problem is that we weren't even on the freeway yet. We were pulling out of the parking lot. I closed my eyes and let the sensation take over and then I was fine. I was flying. I was free. From that point to about four hours later, my cheeks were stuck under my eyes making a perpetual squint appear on my face. Boy, was I smiling. As a matter of fact, if you look close enough you can still see the crease.

Driving through my old stomping grounds, the streets of Novato, I had three things on my mind, girls, McDonalds, and money. When my therapist dropped me of at my old trailer park, I jumped out and expected applause, but what I got was silence. Nobody screaming with bottles, nobody offering me drugs, nobody even waiting for me. That was when I realized that not only did I change, so did my fellow trailer park people. Well that set my mood for the time being and I felt my energy ebb away, and my heart clench with the closing of my throat. I had nowhere to go.

Walking up to one of my best friend's houses and knocking, I saw her head turn the corner of the hallway and her jaw drop. I dropped my head and smiled and when I looked up again all I saw was her left leg following the rest of her body down the hallway in full sprint. Once again I felt tears well up into my eyes, but this time they were tears of anger and were executed, one by one as they came down my cheek, by a clenched fist. Fine. If they don't want to see me, forget them. I slapped on a hard techno cd, and vibed out. My fist still clenched, and my face set in a hard stare. I was in a hole and my anger only dug me deeper. As a walked, my feet slapping against the pavement that rivaled my heart for coldness, my mind reeled and I don't remember much of that afternoon anymore.

Next thing I remember is my cd player batteries, giving out to the silence of the night, boy, was I cold. I remember thinking about my cell and how I always had somewhere to go. Normally people would go to their houses and sleep in their beds, but my mother and stepfather wanted nothing to do with me and had already rented my room out to some dude that I always had beef with. I still had some money from my release stash, so I took a trip to the 24/7 Safeway, and bought a couple of double-A batteries, and some extra strength Monster energy drinks, which I downed one by one in succession. I was ready for the night, whatever it may hold.

This went on for a while, until about four days into my wandering around, when my money ran out, and I couldn't not sleep anymore. I then ran into the maintenance guy at my trailer park, who let me sleep in the backseat of his van and gave me some food, and my homeless life was born. I managed to scrounge up enough money to go up to Farmers Market every Thursday, where I saw some friends and got some more money. I got through about a month until things started happening. Word started getting around that I was out, and people were driving down the street screaming out my charges for the world to hear. I decided that I had had enough when I was left stranded by my friend, who said I was an embarrassment to him, and felt like my aura was rubbing off onto him. I had spent all my money on cigarettes for him, food for him, rolling papers and stuff to go with it on him, and then he wouldn't split the bus fare, so I could get home to my makeshift bed in Novato. I watched the last bus pull away without me on it, and I reached my mental bottom, I was through. I spent the night in Montecito Plaza in San Rafael, curled up in a ball, wearing only a sleeveless shirt for warmth. I woke up the next morning, called my grandpa in San Francisco, and moved in that same day. Shortly after that, I remembered that The Beat Within offered me a job, and a new me was born.

Thank you Scorpion for your very thoughtful piece. What you share in this note can fit nicely into any of this week's Beat topics. Well, well, well... We are so happy to have you in the office Scorp. Obviously, we see you in a different light now, and are thrilled to what the future may hold for you as a Beat colleague, hopefully a whole lot of opportunities, remember you just have to want it! The support is here friend.

All right the topics addressed in this issue were, "Behind The Laughter" -People laugh for many different reasons. They may be laughing at something that's actually funny, or they may be laughing to cover up another feeling they're experiencing. This is what we want to know about this week.

Has there ever been a time when you used laughter to cover something else up? What was the situation? Why did you laugh in that particular situation? Did it help or hurt the situation? Did your laughter keep you from having to reveal some other emotions? Dig down and try to reveal to us what's behind the laughter.

Our second topic, "In What Way Are You Least Understood?" -There are many times in our lives when we see things that people do, and we just don't understand why. Or people say things which just don't make sense to us. We can't understand how they could say such things. Or they choose to live by codes of conduct, principles or religions that don't make sense to those who live by different codes, principles or religions. What we want to know is what do others understand least about you? Is it personal thoughts you have that no one else knows? Is it secrets you want to keep secret? Or are there things that you do or say or think that even you don't understand about yourself? Take a minute to think about it, then tell us what about you is the least understood, either by others or by you — or by both.

And our third topic, "One Person's Trash Is Another's Treasure" -There's a saying that goes: "One person's trash is another person's treasure." Have you ever taken something for granted that someone else treasured? Or have you thrown something out that someone else snatched up right away? Or have you ever given up on loving someone — until you saw them loving someone else?

What about the flip side? Have you ever got something that was special to you from someone that didn't want it anymore? Do you have a favorite hand-me-down fit? What do you cherish that someone else might look at and say, "That's garbage to me." Let us know about the relationship between what's one person's trash and another's treasure.

With this said, lets plug our 16th editorial note writing contest! The topic to consider is, "A Letter To The President." For this contest we want you serious writers to write a letter to President Bush! It is our goal to not only post these letters in The Beat Within publication and our website, but to send them off to the White House too! Now, do we need to suggest topics on what to talk about? Doubt it. So with this said, our contest question is all about you writing a letter to President Bush.

The deadline, deadline will be Election Day, Tuesday, November 7, 2006. As is the case with all of our writing contests, that all pieces submitted will be featured in the BWO (Beat WithOut) section of the "big" Beat over several issues. And once all featured, The Beat editors will read and vote on their four favorites. From these reads, our top-vote-getter will receive a one-hundred-dollar money order. Our second place winner will get a fifty-dollar money order. And our third and fourth place winners will receive twenty-five-dollar money orders. Good luck writers!

Before we close this ed note, lets give praise to this week's POW (Piece Of the Week) recipients, they are Iyshawn, Lil' Cal, The Rollin' Stoner, Ally Bo/Tt, Chop, Sebastian, Lil' Jt, Iggy, Big Vic all from the 150 Crew. From SF/YGC we have Qbb, Fat Rat, Sib, and Zoltan. Last but not least from Marin we have Heather, Ebony and Deanna. Awesome writers! You all step up huge!

Looking over the final copy of The Beat we found a mistake. There are three of you, Slug, Jazzy-Bo, and B-Eyes all from Walden House PSK, that deserves the POW title but was instead in the Co-POW section. We apoligize for this error and keep up the good work.

Because of your incredible dedication, this week's publication goes out to you POW winners! May every single one of you find freedom, and you continue to teach, continue to show no fear when it comes to being a leader in your communities. We are pulling for you to make it! We look forward to hearing from you all down the road, if not, next week!

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The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our commuities already–we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

Spiritual Advisor: Jack Jacqua

Special Volunteer: Nancy DeMartini

Book Donor: Marisela Norte

Beat Supporters: The Beat Within greatefully acknowledges the generous support of funders of Pacific News Service's Youth Communications Programs–California Arts Council, California Wellness Foundation, Christensen Fund, Community Foundation of Silicon Valley, Community Technology Foundation of California, Compton Foundation, Creative Work Fund, Cricket Island Foundation, Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, Ford Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Marin Community Foundation, Morris Stulsaft Foundation, Nathan Cummings Foundation, Oakland Fund for Children and Youth, Open Society Institute, Peninsula Community Foundation, Philanthropic Ventures Foundation, S. H. Cowell Foundation, San Francisco Arts Commission, San Francisco Foundation, Shinnyo-en Foundation, W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation, Stone Circles Foundation, Stuart Foundation, Surdna Foundation, The California Endowment, Tides Foundation, Van Loben Sels/Rembe Rock Foundation, Vanguard Public Foundation, Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Youth Justice Funding Collaborative, the Zellerbach Family Fund and individual donors.

Writers: Thanks to all the participants in our workshops in the San Francisco's Youth Guidence Center and Log Cabin Ranch School and the Walden House Facility, Maricopa County, Arizona, Walden House, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, EPA Charter, RAP High School, Alameda County, Santa Cruz County and Marin County Juvenile Halls. As well as Natural Bridge in Virginia, and Hidden TREWTH in Rhode Island. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become a subscriber, contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SF.CA. 94103 or call (415) 503-4170 or check us out at:

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PIECES OF THE WEEK

Stupid, Dumb, And Hyphy

Right now everybody tryna get hyphy
Go dumb and shake their dreads
And that's the main reason
All these youngstas keep coming up dead
Hanging out the sunroof, doing what
You wanna do
Man, look at Mac Dre
He's no longer going dumb dude
On 22's tryna ghost ride the whip
And gas, break, dip
That's exactly why yo' car got stripped
And the police took yo' shhh
Sorry to say but you ain't shining
No more
And you on the bus
So you can't hang out the door
I'm not tryna clown I'm just keeping it real
Maybe you would be too
If you wasn't off hella pills
Instead of spending yo' money on gold grills
And feeling yo'self
Go to the hospital and let them check yo' health
I bet all yo' brain cells is dead
It's sad when you don't know what's going
On in your head
What is the town coming to
I mean I'm just saying
This stuff is serious business ain't nobody playing
Listening to the "go dumb" music
And watching the Hyphy Movement
But where is E-40 and Keek gon' be
When you locked up and going through it
Because you was drinking 1800 and thizzin'
Like they told you to
Man don't listen to these cats
They don't care about you.
Why you think they making money and
Laughing while you doing the fool
You don't go dumb so stop trying to
Maybe you should go to school and get
Off to a new start
Stop doing dumb and start going
SMART

-Iyshawn, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Girl, we don't know what kind of sanity pill you took, but you are telling like it is. Your writing is excellent but your message is even better. What in the world is a girl like you doing in jail? Keep teaching and using The Beat to touch lives!

The Things I see

In the streets of the Bay Area
I've seen kids fighting,
I've seen guns being shot,
I've seen girls have sex with a lot of boys at one time,
I've seen people get killed,
I've seen lots of amounts of money,
I've seen kids and families with no food or house to live in,
I've seen my friends' moms buying dope,
I've seen my friends selling dope to other people's moms
I've seen cats come up from nothing to having it all then fall off and have shhh,
I've seen the police beat the shhh out my brother in our house,
I've seen a lot and I'm only 16 going on17 soon.

Some people don't see the things that I see in person, only on TV, so how do you think someone that see things like that every day will grow up to be? I say they going to be in and out of jail they whole life because that's all they know.

Me, I'm trying to see some other shhh, so I'm 'bout to move to live with my moms down south. I hope that everyone that reads this thinks about what I'm saying and tries to get out of the Bay Area to see something other then the same old shhh sometimes. I'm out tomorrow and if you know me I see you when I see you.

-Qbb B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What a terrific piece to go out on, Marques! What you have described above reads like an indictment of our entire society, and we see no other plea than "Guilty". But what makes this such a wonderful piece is that you are not going to use our guilt (the guilt we all should bear for letting any child grow up in this rich country experiencing what you have experienced) to make excuses for your own. You're going to take control of your life and do something with it. And we know from the consistent quality of your writing and thinking that you are capable of anything you set your mind to. We believe it's always good to get another view of life from a different city or even a different country, so we encourage you to learn as much as you can from as many different perspectives as you can get (as long as you don't forget that temptation and trouble can be found anywhere, if that's what you're looking for). Thank you for all your wonderful pieces, and write us when you get to your Moms and tell us what's happening. Good luck!

What Is Your Plan?

What is your plan? What would you do if it your day to go, not just having your freedom, but off this earth? How would live the rest of your life? Do you think you can sell dope all your life and get away with it?

What is your plan? Do you plan to go to school and live your life like you need to, or do you think that being locked up every five months is going to save you from your destiny?

How would you feel if you got 25 to life? What would you do how would that mess with your mind? Do you think you can handle? Do you think you can manage?

-Fat-Rat B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What excellent questions you ask, Fat-Rat. It shows that you are not just thinking of this moment and where you are, but of the next moment and where you want to be. You could be writing Beat topics, so when you get out, maybe you'll be able to come and help us out. We could use all the help we can get.

Why Am I Here?

Sometimes I wake up and ask myself, "Why am I here?" Sometimes I say to myself, "Maybe if was on the street the time I spent in here, I would've been killed. Maybe God was saving my life or something. Maybe God was just telling me I was doing something that he didn't like that I didn't get caught for."

Sometimes I think, "Maybe God just wanted me to get more into the Bible, and this was the only way." But at other times, I wake up and look in the mirror and my questions get deeper, and I ask myself, "Why am I here?" Or, in other words, "Why is life?" Now this is a question I can't answer for myself, though I try. Like for instance, I'll tell myself, "Maybe I was given life so that I can give life." Or, "Maybe I was given life to make life as it is better than the way it was given to me."

Sometimes I think, "I'm here to give a message." But, what is the message? I guess we'll never know the real reason for life until we reach the gates, huh? So, what if we never reach the gates? Doesn't that give us more of a reason to try and reach the gates?

-Chop, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Hey, you're giving a message right here, like that conclusion about trying to reach the gates of heaven. You know, it does seem like we make the meaning for our lives with the things we do in life. If you can take a life that sent you here for what you were doing out there, and start living a new and better way, then that is the deepest and most important message you could carry — and you don't even need to say it, 'cause your life itself demonstrates that it's possible to change and to better yourself and your life. At some point though, you have to just dig in your heels, take a stand and do it! You can't keep waiting for a sign from God or even wait for the pearly gates, but just do it — and you will have lived a most meaningful life. Be the message, live it.

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Where Will I Be? (Part 2)

I'm sittin' here day after day, week after week
Cryin' my eyes out every night, and bein' told when to speak
Never lettin' no one in to see the real me
Because I've been messed with too many times to let anyone see
And once again, I ask myself
Where will I be?
Where will I be without that pizzle of tweak?
Twirlin' it day by day to cover up the real me?
Where will I be without that 40 of beer?
Poundin' it, gettin' drunk, then breakin' down out of fear?
Where will I be when I'm alone in that room
Four white walls, a cell?
Thinkin' 'bout death, not a tragedy—worse
Lemme tell you, I'll be in hell!
I'll be havin' flashbacks of all the pain I've gone through
Wondering if my current pain is more excruciating than anything I've ever come to?
Wondering why that drain my life is at the edge of hasn't swallowed me whole?
Wondering why, when it's104 degrees out, my body is provoking the cold?
Wondering why, when I look at people, I look through their eyes and see their soul?
Wondering why, when I look at me, I don't see myself?
I see a shadow with a mask over her face
To hide her pain and self-inflicted torture
Getting over shhh at an unnaturally slow pace
Still dwelling on things from when she was nine
And for every second death comes closer, a little bit of her love is dying
And she's wondering
Where will I be?
Where will I be when everyone gives up and lets go?
Where will I be when everyone stops caring and says, "No!"?
Where will I be in seven years, if I'm still doing what I do?
Where will I be when someone tells me they love me and it's the truth?
Why am I alive if I don't believe?
Why am I trying if I can't achieve?
Why am I waiting on something that isn't happening?
Why am I crying when others are laughing?
Why am I alone when people are around?
Why am I hiding when I'm gonna be found?
Why am I paranoid to close my eyes at night?
Why am I, at the same time, wrong and right?
Why can't I answer the question I ask myself?
Maybe, just maybe, I should ask someone else
Where will I be?
Where will I be when I can get a hold of my pain and tears?
Where will I be if what I'm crying my not be tears?
Where will I be when the sky slowly starts to descend?
What is any of this going to do for me in the end?
Why is the fire in my eyes growing as fast as my hatred?
Why is the look on my face telling you, "I want to play dead"?
Why is the hole in my heart expanding as if I'm the one stretching it?
And why am I letting myself get caught up in melodramatic bullshhh?
And where will I be?
Where will I be when I'm on the other side of this 8 x 6 window?
When people be telling me shhh, don't try—I've heard it all before?
Where will I be if the beauty of a lifetime becomes pain?
Where will I be if that pain becomes feelings I can't explain?
My mother always told me not to dwell on the past
To look into the future
But where will I be when my future
Instead of my past, becomes my torture?
And why should I speak when you don't know what I mean?
Maybe I'll wake up and it'll all be a dream
Tick tock, tick tock, I open my eyes
Tick tock, tick tock, the clock stops
I look around
I'm in the depths of hell
Six feet underground
Again

-Heather, Marin

***From The Beat:** Whew, what a poem, Heather. You scream out your pain to fill the whole world, as if you can get no rest, no comfort, no relief, no consolation, no answers, no ground anywhere. Just like in an earthquake, it seems like you feel there's no solidity, no earth you can stand on, can depend on. Whether this vision is drug-induced or not, doesn't mean your view of life isn't real, isn't true. It can be. And if you feel like you're left with only your own standards, visions and decisions to count on and that they vaporize because the more you challenge them, scrutinize them, the more they lose their substance, that's real, too. Is it like you have nothing, no one, including yourself, to hang on to? To count on? But, you know, Heather, as often as you write about your excruciating pain, you never write about what has caused it or what or who is still hurting you, which is your prerogative. It's really nobody's business unless you want to share it with them/us. Is there anyone wise enough, kind enough, trustworthy enough, who you can go who may understand? You write, "Why can't I answer the question I ask myself? Maybe I should ask someone else." If so, can you go to him/her? Get whatever help you need.*

Nobody Believed Me

The time in my life when it got complicated was at the age five! I started being molested by my dad's best friend that we let stay with us. Then it kept happening for four years.

At nine I told my moms—life got worse. Moms didn't believe me. I went to foster care. It took her a long while to get that it really did happen. I was in foster care to, like, not even six months. I got out of foster care and started staying with moms again. Oh, she was still seeing him and one day he raped me. I was only 9 1/2! I didn't tell nobody. I started acting up worse!

They sent me to my step-dad in Cincinnati. I didn't know him that well. Then he started beating me. I went into foster care. I was in one home for, like, three months. I went back with my dad for a day. He beat me; then kicked me out!

I went into foster care again, a different home, for about a year! Then I moved back down there with my mom. I started doing drugs, bein' hella bad, 'cause the room I slept in every night was the room I was raped in, so, yapp, that's what happened.

-Deanna, Marin

***From The Beat:** So has this issue been addressed? Is this best friend of your dad who violently abused/raped you in jail? Are you seeking counseling? Is your mom now supportive? And you dad? What about the step dad in Cincinnati? We'd love to hear what is currently going on with you. It appears that the adults in your life failed you. What's the plan upon getting released? Do you have other family member you could stay with? What's the best solution in your case? Is the system helpful? You totally have our hearts.*

I went into foster care. I was in one home for, like, three months. I went back with my dad for a day. He beat me; then kicked me out!

PIECES OF THE WEEK

My Life / Mi Vida

[verse one and three: Ally Bo; verse two: TT]
can you live my life
of a child that's abandoned
walkin' thru these streets
left in this world stranded
as a young boy wit' no father
now all i can look up to is my mother
now tell me can you live my life
of a child that's abandoned
walkin' thru these streets
left in this world stranded
as a young boy wit' no father
now all i can look up to is my mother
my life is so hard
everythang i'm 'bout to say
come straight from the heart
game i use to play
from the start
as a young kid
comin' up in this world
the things i did
neva had my mom cryin' and ready to curl
now i wish
i can go back in time
all the things i did neva thought 'bout the grind
now drugs money and females dug my mind
now crews and police come from behind
but my mom always been there
for this young man
and my father neva care'
'bout the things i was sayin'
so i had to be aware
of them guns sprayin'
my life is so complicated
and no one understand
can you live my life
of a child that's abandoned
walkin' thru these streets
left in this world stranded
as a young boy wit' no father
now all i can look up to is my mother
now tell me can you live my life
of a child that's abandoned
walkin' thru these streets
left in this world stranded
as a young boy wit' no father
now all i can look up to is my mother
can you live my life
strapped day and night
walkin' around
on the block
wonderin' who i got to pop
man it's gettin' crazy
all my boys havin' babies
and none of us had
a dad in our life
who was there to treat us right
'cause he either bounced in the beginnin'
or in the pen doin' life
so all we have left is our mom to look up to
stress out 'cause we runnin' the streets actin' a foo'
now we locked up don't know what to do
but get on our knees prayin' to get home soon
and yeah i'm the dude
who grew up with no father
and yeah i'm the dude who walks
these streets stranded
wit' no place to go feelin' abandoned
so tell me can you live my life
of a child that's abandoned
walkin' thru these streets
left in this world stranded
as a young boy wit' no father
now all i can look up to is my mother
now tell me can you live my life
of a child that's abandoned
walkin' thru these streets
left in this world stranded
as a young boy wit' no father
now all i can look up to is my mother
as this kid grew up
started doin' thangs
saw what was up
in the 'hood gettin' change
neva wanted the life of a thug
so everythang gots to change
what can i do
now i'm makin' money
sittin' on twenty-two's
gettin' snow bunnies
only seventeen
wit' a kid in the cradle
spendin' so much green
the accident was fatal
in this regal mist-green
puttin' the pedal to the metal
a young kid
startin' robbin' people
too sick
doin' thangs that's illegal
got the job
that comes wit' the 'hood
neva stopped
'cause i thought it was all good
walkin' around wit' a gun
loud sounds
i bust one
got pounds
smoke a blunt
that the life i've lived
and these is all the things i did
can you live my life
of a child that's abandoned
walkin' thru these streets
left in this world stranded
as a young boy wit' no father
now all i can look up to is my mother
now tell me can you live my life
of a child that's abandoned
walkin' thru these streets
left in this world stranded
as a young boy wit' no father
now all i can look up to is my mother

-Ally Bo & TT, 150 Crew

***From The Street:** It's a strong song with tight rhymes that move the heart and challenge the mind. Sad to say it's not a question of "can you live my life" — 'cause those born to it have no choice but try to survive. So many that get judged for making bad choices as kids, couldn't see too much else available than what they did, 'cause what else was there to do but survive in the life you're born into. However, that holds true only up to a certain age, after which you see that life will only end in an early grave or in a locked cage if you don't change your ways. What started out as survival becomes merely habit, until you fall to the gun of a rival 'cause you continued to sav' it long after you should have known it's different now that you're almost grown. But we're preaching to the choir, 'cause we know a better life is your deepest desire. Thanks for collaborating in rhyme to educate others about what's behind the sad fate of young people locked up doing time, 'cause at least you can write in The Beat about the realities of being born to the street.*

So I guess what I'm trying to say is I laugh and cap on people in to make the best out of the bad situation because if we keep coming back things just gone get worse and worse.

Behind The Laughter

I think everybody in the halls laughs and smile for a reason. Sometimes it gets on my last nerve when I see some of these young punks in here giggling and play fighting with each other. I think like, "What the hell is there to be happy about when you in juvenile hall?" But then you have to give it more thought.

I look at everybody in B2 and everybody been here more than twice, so I guess everybody got something they like about the halls if they keep coming back... And I sit up in here and get on some of these young punks' line to make myself feel better. So I guess what I'm trying to say is I laugh and cap on people in to make the best out of the bad situation because if we keep coming back things just gone get worse and worse. So you damn right I sit in here and laugh with the homies because even though things can be better, they can also get worse. And things usually get worse because they get better. And it's easier for things to get worse than to get better and like a challenge. So I'm going to do things for the better. That's why I sit up in here and laugh you feel me.

-Lil' Cal B2, SF/YGC

***From The Beat:** Of course we like that you seem to have turned a mental corner and know that you don't want to come back here, meaning you do want to make some changes in your life on the outs. But what we like even more than that is that you show how much you are thinking, how much you are not accepting things on face value, how much you are going beneath the surface of things, including the surface of your own thoughts. That is worth gold to us... and to you!*

PIECES OF THE WEEK

The Way the Wind Blows

i feel many different emotions at once
most of them i can't express with words
it hurts me internally to know i might have do it
another way
pain stabs me when i sit and think
think about how i could have lived if i only ...
if i only had a chance to work again at the beat
defeat laughs at me while i rot in my cell
trying to get well
my heart continues to swell
because truly only time will tell
my past has put thorns in my present
this lesson i sit and try to learn
compresses life
i might make it
i hope that my future unfolds until its naked
i'm exhausted by all this
at the premature age of seventeen
heaven now seems
that it has no place for me
i got to face that i will never be replaced
even in space
my life will never be the same
if i could travel in time
not to rewind
but to discover the important things i wasn't able to
find
if i was a star i wouldn't shine
'cause who i am
another like me you'll never be able to find
i'm too unique to retreat
from this game in which i compete
maybe i'm stone
'cause i'm wounded yet can't bleed
plus you wouldn't believe
what i can achieve
in moments
so i hold ice in my hand
and contrast it with my heart
to see which is coldest
maybe you can distinguish the two
both eyelids closed and my point is proved
which way does the wind blow really
am i the hardest
am i to my audience the artist
does it matter
yeaah damn right
the wind blows north toward success

-Sebastian, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If south is the low road, where you thought being hard and cold was the best way to go, putting someone else's flesh on the block to win, place or show, 'cause you needed to make money and you thought, "I'll do what I know, 'cause I'm smarter than the next brother and that's fashow!" — well, then you're right, the wind blows north, where you might have to cinch your pants tight 'cause the money doesn't flow in overnight, 'cause now you know it could be worse; you thought being blessed didn't matter until you felt the curse again, and you went from thinking you were the best to feeling the worst again, locked up again; everything you thought was right got mucked up again. What you thought was a good reasoning was sick scheming, a rationalization for abandoning your best dreaming in the name of necessity, when really it was pure vanity, you lacked the humility to maintain your sanity. So your raced back into the fast lane, trying to get over on the world by hustling girls when what you needed to be was a poor, struggling artist working for a just society. Social injustice is no excuse for you to refuse to take the high road, 'cause with the gift of talent and intelligence comes a higher duty to use your God-given gifts to praise beauty but also justice and truth. It's the only game in which to compete automatically lifts you above the pitfalls of the street. So stop feeling sorry for yourself, redefine the meaning of wealth and get yourself some mental health, 'cause it kills the spirit to live by stealth.

They Don't Know The 'Real' Me

I am a number
I am a bar code
I am a race
I am a night and a color
This is all I am to them —
To the police, to the DA, to whoever "they" are
I am a crime
I am a deed
I am a mistake
I am a report
They do not know me
They don't know the way I laugh
The way I speak
The way I walk
They don't know the way I think
The way I cry... (not that I do, but they wouldn't know it
even if I did)
They don't know me
They don't want to know me
They don't want to talk to me about the real me
The one behind the numbers
Behind the crime
Behind the blond hair
The scratchy beard
Behind the innocent looking face
The interesting, intelligent, and easy-going me

-Zoltan B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Another homerun of a poem, Zoltan! It's true that the ones who have so much power over your life are making judgments about you without knowing you, but we have to wonder if you are not doing some of the same about "them." Are you looking behind the title, behind the badge, behind the exterior to what might lie beneath? This is a hard thing to do for anyone, so we wonder how one as "interesting, intelligent, and easy-going" as you can apply his own thinking to the "other." We appreciate your courageous words... Great writing!

Misunderstood

I'm misunderstood all the time by my other inmates. You see, the way I am in jail isn't the way I am on the outs. Some people might say that I'm acting like a sucker or a punk.

I'm just misunderstood because I haven't made it clear on who I really am. Strange thing is I'm proud of it. I don't know, maybe being in jail actually broke me, seeing as how I would normally try and mash somebody's face in or knock out some teeth — either way is fine with me.

The reason I say I'm misunderstood is because people take my kindness as a weakness. So they take advantage of it and talk a bunch of shhh to me for no apparent reason. You see I'm misunderstood, but these things, I understand them perfectly. I see them as a twelve-year-old stuck in a seventeen-year-old's body, no matter how hard or angry they pretend to be. Being patient and not letting my emotions control me helped me see and understand them and myself a whole lot more.

So my words — to whomever reads this: grow up and start acting your age, 'cause if you don't you'll understand once they ship yo' ass off to CYA or Log Cabin. So grow up man, and forget the nonsense. Feel me or don't feel me, either way you'll learn eventually.

-Sib B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: All of us mature at our own rate, Brandon, and the irony of your very wise words are that they will fall on deaf ears for those who haven't matured yet (you can't just tell a child to act his age and expect him to do so, because he's still thinking like a child), and the ones who are maturing, like you, will know exactly what you're talking about. We commend you for your strength and courage — your willingness to look at yourself with a critical eye and acknowledge that there were things you wanted to change. It's easy to follow the pack, but for one to stand on his own two feet, that is the mark of an adult.

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Alone

I'm alone in this world,
No one here to help me in this life.
I feel lost and I need help.
I act bad so people will help me
But no one does.
They just look.
I'm here looking for someone to help me
But no one does.
I cry so people will feel sorry for me.
They walk by
Like I'm not there.
I need someone to love me.
I need someone to care.
Why do they act like I'm not there?
I am human.
I do have feelings
So I guess I have to do this all by myself.
I'm alone, in this world

-Iggy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your poem is dark, and it's beautiful because it is overflowing with honesty. This is really tough to read because we can't stand the thought of someone feeling like no one in the world gives a crap about him or her. Sometimes we get so lost in guilt, anger and sadness we convince ourselves that no one cares. Then there are those of us who simply don't have a strong support system and it's been that way all our life. Either way please do not give up on yourself; there is no better cause worth fighting for. Everyone tries to communicate without saying exactly what he or she needs because they are scared or prideful or whatever. Sometimes though you have to throw yourself out there and outright ask for help.

Hide My Sadness With A Smile

I was down on the concrete ground, layin' down face first, hands cuffed behind my back. I look around and I see five other of my homies in the same position as me. "Damn," I thought to myself, "I messed up tonight."

As I'm put in the back of the cop car with my homies, we begin talking about stupid shhh—basically me and him were just goofin' off in the back, laughin' our asses off about anything, talking 'bout shhh that would make us crack up—basically we were just doing what we could not to think about the mess we got ourselves into. We were tryna avoid being sad. Deep down I had that bad, sad feeling that whole night. We were tryna make anything funny, make the situation we were in seem not as bad. So far I'm still locked up and I'm still hiding my sadness with a smile.

I try not to dwell on where I'm at too much and try to smile as much as possible. It makes the days go by a little easier and me and the homies stay goofin' off, waitin' 'til we get out again, to get back to the fun, waiting 'til I won't have to hide my sadness no more.

-The Rollin' Stoner, Marin

From The Beat: Very thoughtful piece. Plenty of people who find themselves incarcerated put up big fronts to hide the pain, but wouldn't it be interesting if none of us wore masks, and we wore our emotions on our sleeves? When do you find it's ok to be true to yourself? Is it with your family? Alone?

Don't Cry

My life has always been complicated.
I've always had to suck up my tears from the things that I feared.
And when I seen something wrong, I was told that everything would be all right.
But I knew that nothing was all right and that everything was wrong,
but because I was so young, I was told not to say nothing.
So when a man decided he want to be a witch and put his hands on my mother
in front of me, I just looked in her eyes and walked away.
And when my mother left me and my little bro home alone and he started to cry,
I looked him in the eyes and told him everything was going to be ok,
and that crying wasn't going to bring her back.

-Ebony, Marin

From The Beat: Such a sad honest piece you deliver. You take us readers to these ugly times in your young life. We can feel your pain, your brother's sadness, fear and tears. Your brother is lucky to have a sister like you. We hope the two of you reunite soon. We look forward to reading more from you too!

Behind The Scene

behind the laughter is a frown so deep
along with the frozen tears i don't weep
it covers up for a lot of my emotions
just like dry skin, we cover with lotion
some people see through it like a clear blue ocean
but the laughter is always in motion
sometimes the tears just want to come out
like when some people are afraid they cannot shout
anger fills your blood stream
laughter comes out instead of a scream
but being this happy is just a dream
i am boiling inside, can you see the steam
the smile i show is not pure
it's some kind of disease with no cure
it will stay there until i'm deceased

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It is a technique of survival, laughing in the face of stress when everything in your heart is truly depressed — or raging without engaging 'cause it's useless, fruitless to rage. So you do your best to survive, it's just another strategy employed in life, even if it feels like a lie 'cause you're so unhappy inside. One day this dark time will end, and you've got to survive, young friend.

I try not to dwell on where I'm at too much and try to smile as much as possible. It makes the days go by a little easier. . .

These Streets Are Crazy

every day and night
somebody is gettin' killed
homeless beggin' for meals
while youngsters are gettin' hit by the steel
moms cryin' and we not knowin' how it feel
my friends are gettin' killed
i'm knowin' it's real
i have dreams of then
while shakin' with a chill
how does it feel gettin' nailed against your will
five-oh running around tryin' to find out what's the deal
they ain't knowin' we get hyfee off them pills
damn man these streets are gettin' shady
daddies gettin' killed leavin' they' girl wit' the baby
these streets are gettin' crazy
slow down before you have nothin' left
strugglin' tryin' to take your last breath

-Lil' Jt, 150 Crew

From The Beat: When you want to lay down a lyric with power that's real, everybody reading The Beat gets a chill of recognition, 'cause suffering in the 'hood has reached epic proportions in the streets of Oakland where too many are hurtin', too many are hungry and too many are getting killed. Until the young change the name of the game, stop living and dying in the fast lane, there will be no end to this needless pain. But it's not just perpetrators who bear the blame, it's a selfish society that needs to regain the democratic vistas of the American dream.

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

Memories

Pain guilt
You left me
Your drugs were number one
You yelled at me
Always fighting in front of me
You didn't think I saw you
But I did
At the time I didn't think anything of it
But now I know
I know what the white stuff was on that mirror
Now I know what you fed my dog and why he died
Now I know why you used to hit Raina
But why did you have to get me started
Why didn't you save me from Jr.?
You were never there to see him hit me
You were never there to see him scare me
You didn't ever believe me when I said he hit me
You just back
And I went back to foster care
I thought it was my fault
You never told me that it wasn't my fault
You just went on
In and out of foster care for basically my whole life
Not one visit while I wasn't with you
Having to jump out my window to escape
Was not want I wanted to do
Watching you and dad fight all the time
You never cared you just said to me get out
Ricky always had to come and find me
Run was the thing that always popped in my head
And now I'm not with you at all
You stop your contact with me often
But I never gave up on you
But you sure gave up on me
You were not a mom
Your were a friend
Not a good one
Now I sit here crying
Watching me get rushed to the hospital
Because grandma died
The bad thing was I made the decision you should have made
Watching her die was not fun
So now I cut my arms to feel something
But there is nothing
No pain no guilt no birth
I know that you felt pain when you heard I was in the hospital
But you never came
So then I got out and sit here watching
My arms, my legs and me hands bleed
I do this because I don't want you to know I'm mad at you
For you not ever being there for me was the thing to do
You would hope that these things would not affect me but it does
Then boom, in a blink of an eye, the memory of that night fluttered back
I could have died
The pain and all the tires
The burns were so much
Hearing my sister screaming
She was stuck in the stove
You blamed us for sitting too close
Boo, another memory
The gun shot from when I shot you in the leg
I felt the pain and the guilt
They said it was not my fault
But the looks I got from my family was so much
Boom, the last memory
Of all the glass
The mirror had fell
So much blood
I thought that it was from someone else
But then I saw I was the one bleeding
All the flashes the screaming the tires
The pain
Why were you not there?
Why did you have to leave?
Now I think of all the things —
Like you not liking my boyfriend because he's black
And the only thing I can say is why
I just wish you knew me

-B-Eyes, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: No one — NO ONE — should have to deal with memories like these, because no child should have to deal with a reality like yours. But you are dealing with it through memory, through pain, and through the beautiful (but sad) way you express yourself. It sounds to us that you are suffering from at least one condition we know about called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a condition common to people who have been to war! And one of the ways to reduce its effects is to do just what you are doing... look at the terrible and fearful memories as directly as you can. Write about them. Talk about them. Reduce their power to hurt you by taking control of them. You have every reason to be angry at the person you're addressing in this poem (who we fear must be your mother or father — and then we start to wonder what he or she suffered as a child...). Even though we understand why you'd cut yourself to make yourself feel real pain (partly because it's too hard to feel the inner pain you write about), we hope that you find a way to stop. Use our pages. Cut yourself with words onto paper and not with knives onto skin. We will bleed and hurt with you.

Girl's Gone

the girl i gave up is another man's queen
she used to love me like a dope fiend
had her hooked like a drug addict
then things got hard to see, like a t v with static
i dropped her, and the next man picked her up
he was feeling like he won the world cup.
while i was feeling like i didn't even qualify
no more love, my life was dry
i wish i could get a second chance
but with her new man, her love is enhanced
i could do right, i won't do wrong
but it's too late, no more love songs

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Ah, it's a poem of sorrow and knowledge, a sadder and wiser man who's been to the college of the broken heart. The power you held over her, went to your head, so you refused to humble yourself and broke up instead. Oh well, enough said. Live and learn as the world turns.

A Homeless Man

I didn't reallly understand what someone could do with my trash and why it would mean something to somone else until I seen a homeless man scramblin' through my trash.

I saw the look in his eye when I threw away a whole load of cans and old sneakers. He looked angry but also happy at the same old time.

I felt sorry for him, so I come from behind the window and asked him if he was hungry. He said "yeah"and at that time I had a whole load of leftovers. So he got them pots and all!

I highly doubt that he kept the pots. But that just goes to show: One man's trash can also be another man's treasure.

-Young Dave, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is a great little story, we loved the idea of someome looking "angry and happy at the same time. What was it like for you, giving this person food, making his day a little brighter. Did it feel good, knowing that you were helping someone?

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

I Told The Devil To Avoid Us

I told the devil to avoid us
There's nothing he can do to try to stop us
Or hold you back
From where we choose to be
Ask where I'm heading
To prosperity
Ain't going back to no penitentiary
Rather die before they capture me
I see
They evilous activities
They brought up to my face
In the media
Tryna frame me on some crime procedure
I'm just a survivor
Shooting at my goal
Ain't waiting for the day to come get me
But I'm gonna greet it with a humble soul
Don't try to dwell
My soul in vanity
I grew up in the poverty situation
I have a lot of ambition
There's always another way to strive

-Dean, Marin

From The Beat: Powerful piece! Now tell us what your plan is to make it up out of this darkness! Also, how did you fall into such a position?

I Dream of Life

every time i dream of life
i dream of kids and just one wife
i dream of emotions
with a bunch of commotion
with a bloodline that runs deep as oceans
i dream of soarin' and never comin' down
travelin' the world without touchin' ground
or being a pitcher on the mound
throwing the ball before the batter gives it a pound
but only the ball is my pride
and then i struggle to realize that one move can jeopardize
every move i make so i try to keep my eyes on the prize
but when there's no prize for me to keep my eyes on
there's nothing more to do than to let bygones be bygones
'cause i've got to move forward too
and find something else to look forward to
'cause life is more than fast cars hoes and tricks
and gettin' bricks by always hittin' licks
life is hustlin' the legal way to make it
instead of just tryin' to take it
and when you wanna give up knowin' how to fake it
life is being responsible for your actions in combat
and savoring every moment 'cause you never get your time back
knowin' when to say yes and no
and finding a way to let true feelings show
i dream of fallin' real far tryin' to scream and can't weep
but finally making the right choice and landing on my feet

-Chop, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Hey we see you making the right choice, too, 'cause we've been reading your words and hearing your voice through these weeks and we think you're finally ready to reach deep enough to change 'cause you know that fast life can't be maintained for much longer — plus you're stronger now and smarter too, able to figure out what you really need to do, make a plan and follow through. If you're out looking for a legal job and you get ninety-nine no's and one yes — that's a complete success! But if you go back to mobbin', you'll be dreamin' of that fall where you're screamin' and sobbin' all the way down to six feet deep or locked away from the light of day in the penitentiary. Nah, you can see through that! So land on your feet and take a stand like a man, not another j-at. Now congratulations on your release! You have our address, come and see us. Peace!

The Family Way — Pass It Down

I wrote about one person's trash being another person's treasure because when I was little (and still now to this day) my cousin's would give me old clothing. I'm not going to lie - a lot of the hand-me-down clothes I kept. It's just how it's done in the family, like my uncle gave it to Lalon, and Lalon gave it to Devon. Then Devon would give it to Eddie and now I got it.

I know when I grow out of the clothes I will give it to some one in my family who could fit it. It goes this way if something is too small or my shoes are too tight so I give them a way. When the other person gets it they think of it in a different way. They might think they look good in it. So that is my trash and his treasure.

I'm going to use me for another example. When my Uncle Lawrence was younger he used to collect NBA hats and jerseys but now that he is older he feels no need for that stuff so he gives it to me. His trash is my treasure.

-Slim, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Slim these are excellent examples of one man's trash being another man's treasure. You did a nice job of turning a family tradition into an interesting story related to the topic. It sounds like you have some loving people out there who are looking out for you. No matter how large or small that help may be, especially when it comes from family, and nothing is expected in return except the same kind of generosity, one should feel lucky.

Thoughts

What up Beat, como han estado? (How have you been?) This is that one and only crazy vato Goofy from San Francisco once again.

Bueno, today I want to write about my thoughts as me being a gang member. Now think about this. If you're a gang member you know what I'm writing about. You know those thoughts of, "What if I get blasted by rivals tonight?" or, "Where is this 'hood life taking me?"

As I sit behind a locked door, I think about a lot of things. 99 percent of the things that come to mind are about life on the outside. I've been down for a long minute, and I ain't nowhere near my next court date. These past four and a half months I've thought a lot about life. I don't like sleeping unless I'm really tired. And you know a few months is more than enough time to think about life.

A lot of what runs through a gang member's dome are thoughts of death. Either about your death or a rival's death. But not me... Shhh, I'm trying to stay alive. I love breathing, Que no? We all know this 'hood life won't lead to nothing but a cell-block, or 6 ft. under. But to a gang member that was raised in the 'hood, the gangsta's life is addicting. After so long we ain't trippin' off getting blasted 'cause our mentality is like. "We all gotta die someday," right?

But at some point it's gonna change. How you think the big homies lasted so long in the 'hood? They weren't thinking about death their whole lives. Put some mind into this barrio game we're all playing. You won't play a game and win unless you know the rules to the game. Well, time's up for me.

-Goofy B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We always admire how you keep your thoughts real, even when we wish you'd come to different conclusions. (For example, what about all those big homies who haven't lasted? Do you think they were thinking any different from you? A bullet, aimed or stray, doesn't know what you're thinking...) Yes, this life is addicting, and like an addiction to heroin, it leads to death or destruction. And like heroin addicts, those addicted to the 'hood can also kick the habit. Not easily, to be sure, but it can be done. If you get a chance, we'd like you to read a book called "There Are No Children Here," by Alex Kotlowitz. (Maybe your librarian has it; maybe you just have to seek it out.) It was written 15 years ago, but it is as relevant today as then, and we think you would appreciate it. As we've told you so many times, Goofy, you have so much to give, so much to teach... and yet we fear you're willing to risk it all for a game you didn't invent but simply accepted from others who went before you. Standing on your own may be the hardest thing there is to do — harder than going along even with a hard-ass gang — but the rewards are not only freedom, but life itself. Keep writing, and we'll keep reading. And keep thinking.

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

You Didn't Have Control

Looking back—
whenever you get in trouble,
it's for something that could have easily been avoided.
I always think, "What if I could of just done that simple thing
that would of stopped me of getting in trouble?"
I would have been much happier
if I avoided one of the many situations that got me in trouble,
to the alternative of avoiding the system and staying out of the set-up of probation,
or house arrest, or even having charges, period.
It's almost as if you should have known better, but you didn't have control.

-Ryan, Marin

From The Beat: Sometimes it just takes that first time you stop and say, "You know what? This time I'm not going for whatever.... No, it's not worth it." and you don't do it. Best to you! Then again, peer pressure is a... And we hope the next time you don't let it get the best of you.

One Person's Trash Is Another's Treasure

I always find the most amazing things in other people's trash. Every time I see a pile of stuff outside a house, on the street, wherever I check it out. A lot of times I just grab articles that really are pieces of shhh, but for some reason I think I might need 'em or I get strangely attached.

However I have found a lot of cool shhh — books, tapes, a record player, a working boom-box/CD player, gorgeous old red burnt velvet arm chair, boots with fire on 'em, a typewriter... the list continues. I like it when people put all their junk out. It's a form of recycling. It'll be of use to someone. I don't know if anything I've ever thrown away been of any use to anyone, but any time I don't have a use for something I kick it down or put it out for the homebums.

-Slug, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: We love this piece, not just because it is exactly what the topic asked for, but because you show how material things don't have to become trash on the street. Plus, we love the term "homebums," because it seems like you're not looking down on anyone, but including yourself in the category! If you think of this piece as something you tossed off and threw our way, we think of it as treasure!

Sick

I'm so sick of people telling me what there gonna do for me, because talk is cheap especially when your selling a dream.

I'm more sick of people acting like they're grown, but their mind is on getting hype, going dumb and being on one.

I'm so sick of woman degrading there self's, with foul names, and eyes untrained and to know when drama expresses itself.

I'm so sick of only half a man with so much pride but so many lives, and all these promises not kept.

I'm so sick of my people not taken the next step and being afraid to be loved and protesting against help.

I'm sick of people destroying the lives of there self, and believing it affects everyone else, and believing it affects everyone else, and not caring about what they really felt, which way fear brought on by self guilt.

I'm so sick of people saying what that should have did, but what they would have did is what they did do, and it's too late to do what you could have did. You dig?

I'm so sick the youngsta being on the corner got hella kids and baby-mamas, and baby-daddies trying to put gas in the Caddy, tryna act like there happy but they can't put it past me, 'cause I throw it right back, so they can change the cycle they rotate naturally.

I'm so sick of trying to be the a boss, when I'm more like a leader that's dipped in apple sauce, more like a cheetah when it comes to my words, better than most, is a phrase I've lost heard.

Man I'm just sick, just sick of being tired, and getting higher, letting the purple burn my inside like fire, letting the haters play the game of despiser. Man I know it's time to get wiser 'cause once ammonia hits, or some flu shhh, I'm-a have to put the pen down and retire.

-Young Leader, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We should all be sick! First of all, we want to say that this was an excellent piece! Second of all, how did we get here? How did our society become so dysfunctional? A leader is exactly what this society needs. People are so lost, no one seems to feel any responsibly for anyone other than themselves. Yet, at the same time everyone wants to be part of something. Now is not the time to retire, now is the time to build. Now is the time to speak your mind. Now is the time to proclaim, "I am sick, sick of it all! And I'm ready for change!" You are a leader; point us in the right direction. And next time don't forget to put your name. Ya' dig?

The Tiger's Stripes

Cryptic hodgepodge idiosyncratic red armies struggling to defeat the storm of belligerence awaiting. Their souls amidst traverse space liquid air in distinguishable to the aeonflux of mass pornography interrupted only by soft merciful pauses in which the travelers enumerate the silence and wish for it's infinity... likewise do I yearn for this peaceful time in which I reflect on the beauty and sorrowful perfection of a single sob.

-Slug, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: We give this a co-pow designation because of the sound of the words you have so poetically strung together. At the same time, Slug, we would love an explanation of this poem in words that we can all understand...

I Wouldn't Talk About It

My life got complicated when I was younger.
I got molested and raped
when I was about six or seven
my mama and hella other people put me in individual consulting
and I wouldn't talk about it.
I just keep building up my anger
in about elementary school, I got into gangs,
so my mama decided to send me to my dad's in Ohio.
So I went and my dad would beat the shhh outta me fo' no reason a
nd wouldn't let me go outside, so I snuck out
most of the time to get drunk, to get high.
And me and my dad got into this big ass fight
my dad went to jail and I went to juvy in Ohio.
Then they sent me back to California
I got back in gangs and tried thizzle, got hooked.
Then quit, because I got a boyfriend.
now 'bout to go to placement fo' a year and my man gonna wait fo' me.
And that how my life got complicated.

-Young One, Marin

From The Beat: It is so messed up, how you were the victim to such violence. We also understand how hard it must be to open up, but we hope you have found the confidence and the right support to do so. Would you consider yourself a pretty open person now? What is your relationship like with your mom and dad now? Sounds to us like you recognize your problems, that's a big step. Good for you! We wish you the best with placement, family and of course with your man, and we believe in time, if you are serious about bettering your life, this complicated life you lead now will become less complicated and from what you have experienced, will truly make you a better person, even an important teacher!

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

Tears Of A Man

Tears of a man can show any time of the day
When you hurt, or are locked up in yo' room, or even when you pray
Tears of a man is not to be laughed at
'Cause you don't know what he been through
He probably got blapped at
Tears of a man is tears of a man
If it's a real man readin' dis
I know you undastan'

-Ree, Marin

From The Beat: Wonderful poem, Ree. There's an old Irish saying, "Sooner or later, life will break your heart." And that means everybody's hearts, including men's. There's no shame in crying, no matter who you are. Crying can show respect.

Oakland

Right now in the town
Its really going down
Everybody killing each other
Tryna get they crown
Girls having babies
Before they even turn into ladies
Not knowing who the baby daddy is
Or how they're gonna take care of a kid
Dudes not wanting to claim their children
Because they did it raw, wit' a rip
But that's what you get for tryna
Stick, move, and dip
Corners fill with young boys
All tryna make a few sales
Working to provide for their families
And earn respect as well
Young girls selling they bodies
To anybody who wanna holla
Giving up their goods for 20 or 30 dollars
Kids growing up with a single-mom
And broken promises from dad
Wishing he'd stop by even if it's
Just to say "Hi".
Everybody robbing each other just
To get some dough
Friends betraying friends
For knowledge they'll never know
And everybody tryna snort powder (cocaine)
Just because Keek said so
Half of the teenage population is
In and out of the hall
And instead of work together
We waiting on each other to fall
Half of the parents shootin' up
And smoking crack
Then the hall staff wonder
Why we keep coming back
It's a lot I can say about what's
Going on in the bay
But it's even more going down
When it comes to the Town

-Iyshawn, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Always saying the most righteous things Iyshawn. You should be out there doing the right thing. Showing your friends by example what's the right thing. If someone as smart as you is getting locked up, how's that gonna look to your friends who must look to you for moral guidance. When you get out you need to come to ur office and get involved in Beat outreach. Your writing touches us and we are sure your presence in the community will do the same too.

24/7

24 hours a day, 7 days a week, packin' a strap
Thinking you ain't scared, but always watchin' yo' back
'Cause the rival gang is tryna take you off the map
Wishin' you got true homies, but they just know how to act
When somethin' goes down, everything is just a trap
'Cause there is no such thing as a true homie, and that's a fact
Then riding on the enemy, because they are invading your land
And to you it's a dis(respect), 'cause it's your turf where they stand
With heavy metal gripped in your hand
Snorting cocaine, 'cause it's all part of the game
Tryna get over the stress and pain
'Cause another homie died and demons are calling your name
Telling you to retaliate
'Cause your heart if full of hate
Quick to act—never hesitate
That's the way you learn in the Golden Gate
But if you want to change your life, just know it's not too late
Just put your hands in God's and have faith
'Cause He is the only person that will keep you safe
So just change your life
And stick by the Lord's side
Because if you do, everything will be all right
Until the end of times

-Smiley

From The Beat: Powerful poem, Smiley. So did you take your own advice? Have you found a new way to live your life free of violence and darkness? What was your wake up call? Is this poem about you? What's your plan upon leaving the hall?

I Used To Be Called Baby Face

As I grow up, times seem to be getting harder and hearts that seem to be sincere become colder. When you're young, you take things for granted and you think you'll live for eternity. Well, maybe not forever but you do think you're untouchable. You don't plan on dying, no one does, but as you sit on your block and bust moves you start thinking fast, not smart.

Now on to something else – being misunderstood. No one asks to be born into a world where it gets harder every single day. For you to find a job, it is really hard. It's hard when you don't have a person in your family that's trying to push you to do your best. That's why kids do better when they have that older person who sees that he's not just a child that will soon be a lost cause.

I'm not sorry for the hand I was dealt. I'm going to prove to God that I was the right selection for this life full of struggle. Bound to lose and totally out control, I humbly apologized for the road I chose. Losing my dreams and landing in this desolated place where they denationalize Latino and black races isn't for me.

-Alarcon, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You really have put some thought into how your words fit together and it makes for a nice read. You have a few sentences that feel like they have jumped off the page and ran straight into our heads, particularly in the first two paragraphs. You are right to acknowledge that some of us have it harder than others, and love and support can go so much further that people realize (sometimes further than money). You are also right to say, "Oh well, nothing's going to stop me." We could all find reasons not to do what we need to do. We could all say this is too hard and not even try. Don't let your circumstances be an excuse to fail but instead a reason to succeed.

Trash As Treasure

Well, it's like this see. I'm from Oakland, and every Wednesday, whatever you don't want, like furniture or bikes or anything you don't want, you put on the curb and they will take it away. But sometimes before they can come pick it up, people walk by and go through it and take what they want. So you be seeing the bike that you just threw out with somebody on it, or clothes or shoes with some homeless person wearin' it.

-Young Iysis GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is a great example of how one's trash is another's treasure. It's also a great example of recycling so that things are not wasted. Have you ever turned someone else's trash into your treasure?

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

Why

You ask me why am I hella bad. It runs through my veins, it's in my soul,
it's what I've been told.
You ask me why don't I follow the rules...
because it's bullshhh what they teach in school
They telling me lies about my history...
blacks is the strongest culture you see,
'cause we been through slavery
Being killed for saying thangs
Why didn't whites get killed for calling us all kinda ninjas and porch monkeys
It's hella wack 'cause I fight to hide my pain and misery
When I grew up where was the man who is supposed to be
My father, somewhere caught up in the rapture not giving a fudge about me,
So I turned to ninjas you see to give me that love and compassion
Why did you leave me?
Alone in the darkness, no food to eat, you left me for the next family
It's so sad 'cause I can't even call you my daddy
I'm so cold-hearted
The streets was my home
Why did I use drugs to wash away the feelings of being alone
But I hate you so much.
Shay, he touched me, he touched me more than once in all the wrong ways
Who could I tell? No one
Who would believe me, a lil' black girl coming from the streets
And when he touched me I couldn't believe
You shay, you are my family, you thought I was asleep
I acted upon it, you see how bad you hurt me
I couldn't even help myself only ten years old and had to play the role
A young girl hurt, I feel like my soul has been sold!

-Jazzy-Bo, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: First, we have to tell you that when you ask, "Who would believe me?" we want to shout our answer: We do. We believe you and it hurts us to know that you are telling the truth (and it hurts us to know that our pain is nothing compared to yours). But second, we want to tell you that the greatest of writers are able to take their pain, their torment, their torture, and turn it into literature — universal truths that reach into the human heart and soul and are recognized as human! You have it, girl! You have that mysterious quality that makes a writer great. You have touched us so very deeply with this that we are left (almost) speechless. The only words we have are these: Keep writing, keep reaching, keep teaching, keep healing, keep living!

Pain And Love

Hey Beat, this is Lil' Skizz from Napa County. The topic I am writing on today is behind the laughter. Behind my laughter is pain, fear, and tears of sadness. I hate showing a fake face. Sometimes I really want to express what I feel, but a lot of people don't understand.

I was a youngster when I got introduced to gangs. I was always with the homeboys kicking it and chillin'.

I hide all of my feelings behind a laugh and smile. After somebody leaves me I just laugh it off and the pain stays inside. My body is drownin' inside with tears of sadness.

-LiL Skizz, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: Even though you say you sometimes hide your real emotions behind laughter, you revealed quite a lot in this short but fine piece. People develop all kinds of defenses to protect themselves against the kind of pain you describe, and fake laughter is just one. We hope you can use the pages of The Beat to reveal some of your emotions without fear, because pushing them down so that they can't hurt you now is only a way of postponing the pain that will come when you look at the causes square in the face and deal with them. It seems to us, from this piece, that you are ready to do that and, in fact, have already begun to do so.

Never Again Once More

"Never again" once more
Why can't I run through that open door
That door to happiness and success
Why am I settling for so much less

I know I can have so much more
If only I can find the courage
To run through that open door
I would achieve so much more

But for now I'm behind locked doors
Thinkin' in my head , "Never again" once more
Thinkin' never again will I end up in this place
With all these staff in my face
Telling me when I could use the bathroom
Telling me when they finna open my door

I say...
"Never again" once more

-Ape-Sterz GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: These are important questions you are asking yourself and we hope you keep asking them. It's clear that you've said, "Never again" before, so what are you planning to do this time that you didn't do before? Wishing is not enough. To do something different requires a serious commitment, and a willingness to give up some of the things that have defined your life up to now. We believe you have the courage inside you to open a new door to a different kind of life, but you have to be willing and committed to a plan that actually produces the results you're looking for. We hope you are!

Why

There was no thought
There was no word
There was no you
Empty inside
Cold on the outside
Why
You left me with nothing
You would be gone for months at a time
The pain of remembering that another birthday was gone
Boom! You'd be there again
But only to see the fight and the back of your head
I'd wish and wish but all it would say is try again
This constant in and out was the pain
Because it was hard for me to say that you were in prison
I remember walking home crying 'cause you just got picked up and I saw you get into the cop car
Now I'm stuck with one word in my head
Why
Why me
Why you
Why you have to leave me
Why
But this is how you left me
Now you wonder why I cut and why I run away from you and the rest of my family
Maybe I was found on the streets
Is what I think still to this day
And that I don't know you and you're my father
So why should I stay if you didn't even stay
You didn't even care
So know it's good-bye unknown father

-B-Eyes, Walden House

From The Beat: We have heard of one kind of therapy where the therapists tells the patient to imagine that a pillow (or some object) is their father (or whoever they are so angry at) and beat the hell out of it while screaming all the things you ever wanted to scream at the real person. We have no idea whether this is an effective strategy (and we're not "prescribing" it for you), but we love the fact that you feel free enough to use The Beat for that purpose. And we encourage you to keep doing so.

Behind The Laughter

Behind the laughter there are emotions, memories and a heart of steel
Behind the heart of steel is pain, regret and tears
It's all hidden—afraid of love and letting anyone near
Behind the tears is a smile of gold, tryna cover up the feelings
Behind the feelings is someone tryna come out strong without trippin'
Showing no one his weakness, to show that he's not tearin' or rippin'
Behind the laughter is a face that doesn't look to the past
Behind the past is what's holding him back
So he looks forward without hesitation to leave the past
Behind the laughter is a gold smile with a pure heart
Behind the smile is someone that never gives up
And never lets anything hold him down
Always looking to the bright side
Always with a new start

-Kali, Marin

From The Beat: When can you take off the "mask" that shields the face that expresses how you really feel? What has hurt you so badly that you don't want others to know? Is there anyone you can trust with your heart? Do you have a special person you can talk to? Or do you work everything out yourself? Whatever works! Good luck! Wonderful poem!

Being Understood

A lot of time people don't be understanding why the repeat offenders keep coming back. Even though we have resources and positive support doesn't mean we know how to change. A lot of us want to, but we are just so used to doing wrong. When we react, the first thing to come to mind is negative. So we have to change slowly, and the process could take years. So we just need people to not give up. But I'm out today, so stay up.

-Preacher, Marin

From The Beat: You're very wise and may be right, especially in your own case, Preacher, but once you accept that you have to change because what you're doing is hurting others and/or sabotaging your life, it can become a matter of when and how you're going to change. Since you already know what's easiest may be what's worst for you to do, what will it take for you to get so fed up with your "negative" choices? When you're on a speeding train going the wrong way that keeps going faster, when will you bail off? But you don't need us to preach—you already know this.

The Streets Of The Jungle—Marin City

The streets of the jungle raised me
The streets of the jungle taught me how to get paper
The streets of the jungle got me my first scraper
The streets of the jungle is where I got my game from
The streets of the jungle is a hawg lifestyle
The streets of the jungle is where ninjas go dummy
The streets of the jungle is one way in, one way out
The streets of the jungle is all I know about
The streets of the jungle is where my uncle got killed
The streets of the jungle is really real
The streets of the jungle is where some people don't know about
But we're back on the map, though
Feel me?

-Henny, Marin

From The Beat: Hey Henny why don't you write The Beat an essay about what growing up in Marin City has been like for you personally? The good and the bad! We also suspect that you thrive in the ugly of your community, by you claming "we're back on the map?" Back on the map for what? Drugs? Violence? Incarceration? Why is this something you are proud of? That's why we want you to tell us where all this comes from in your own words.

Running Is Not Worth It In The Long Run

Placement time in our house, ha ha, here we go again.
I'm going back to placement after being here eight times.
I went to placement before, ran, and then they sent me home.
I messed up two more times and now I'm going back.
I'm seriously tired of this crap! I can't wait to get this over wit'.
I had a plan to run, but I'm hella not going to.
I thought my situation over and it's just too dumb to do right now.
It makes more sense just to stay and do the program.
To all going to placement, don't run—it's not worth it in the long run.

-Jesse, Marin

From The Beat: Good choice, Jesse. We bet you are tired of this game aka juvenile, court, group homes, probation etc. We hope within your new plans are the steps to succeed in the free world, on probation etc. What will motivate you to stay in your program?

Damn, Mom

Damn, Mom
I didn't want it to go this far
You was always there to tell me I was worth more
And that I was too damn smart
Now they sendin' me to another placement
'Cause I failed the one before
My heart is tellin' me to stick it out and stay
But the only thing my mind and body wants is drugs
You was always there for me
Tellin' me you're the one I could trust
And now that I've opened my eyes
It's too late for me to change what happened
Moms, if I was a dude, you'd be my number one lady
But remember, no matter how old I am
I'm still your baby
This is the first time in a while
That I've cried for you
And now I'm sittin' with you on my mind
I said I'm sorry for what I've done and put you through
You mean everything to me
Damn, Mom

-Heather, Marin

From The Beat: We see you are pained by the pain you have given your mom. So Heather, step up to the plate and make some big time changes in your life. Address your ills, take new steps towards a better life, it can be done, you just need to want it! Recognizing your problem is a big step, now put your heart into getting your life back!

These Tears

I have bloody tears--look in my eyes and you'll see fire
I ain't got my mouth closed, but I have been through the wire
These bloody tears show what I've been through in life
A lot of pain, a lot of strife, a lot of scares from knives
I've been through it all—one-on-ones to brawls
From bein' hit wit' sticks and run down by cars
I used to be a star, but now I'm a dim light
I tried to get it back
But I can't
Wit' these bloody tears in sight

-Ree, Marin

From The Beat: Your fabulous poems make us wonder what really has gone down in your life. Do you write to rhyme or have you really suffered what you've written? How were you a star? What happened? Why do you describe yourself as a dim light now? Why is there so much violence in your life? Whatever, you're a fabulous poet who we hope is now working on bettering your life. This is a start!

Laughter

I have been using laugher to cover up my whole life
I even tried to use it when I was in situations that was too late to think right
I have too many situations to sit here and write
But I'ma talk about what happened on Tuesday night
I was on my way to my boyfriend's house
I didn't get to make it 'cause I got blurped by the boys
Nobody told me I was on the track
To make a long story short that's why I'm back…
This my fourth time there and I been here long
I'm tired of singing the same sad-ass song!

-Pooh Bear GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Well, if you'll forgive us, you can't be THAT tired of singing this song if this is already your fourth trip here. How many will it take before you really get tired, so tired you won't be coming back? Have you found that laughter has helped you in situations? Or does it just temporarily make things easier in the moment, but changes nothing in the long run? What will change in the long run?

My Birthday Hurt

On Monday, July 24, 2006, it was my birthday. I thought that I was going to have fun and a great time, but it didn't happen. My real dad didn't even remember about my birthday. He didn't try to call me and said, "Witch, happy birthday! Bye." Dat's what hurts me a lot, because I wanted to talk to him. Dat day my family and I went to Chevy's and my mom brought me a cake. The next day I got locked up for some stupid shhh. Now I'm here, waiting for court on Thursday. I just gotta wait.

-Lil' Foot, Marin

From The Beat: That's brutal. Does your dad know how much what he does means to you? Does he know how much you care about him? Did your messing up the day after your birthday have anything to do with the fact that your dad was so ugly on the phone? If so, next time, can you remember—don't let your dad or anybody else in your life get you to sabotage yourself with their ignorance and cruelty? You need you to defend and protect yourself, especially if your father attacks you, even emotionally. Happy belated birthday from The Beat Within.

My Mom Stopped Trusting Me

My life got complicated in the 9th grade, my freshman year. I stopped doin' my homework and started to smoke weed and thizz. My mom stopped trusting me, so she wouldn't let me go nowhere no more, so now I just did what I wanted. Then it came to the point where I wouldn't go to school or just ditch when I was there.

Then it came to another point where I wouldn't go home on the weekends and I would get drunk and not remember what happened to me or how I got back to my friend house all those nights.

But when I went home wit' new stuff, my mom would always ask me how I got all my new clothes, but I would just lie to her and say that me and my friend got the money by working and bought it at a store, but what me and my friend was really doing was stealing from the stores.

Now me and my mom talk and we have the same relationship that we used to. So that's when my life got complicated!

-Chloe, Marin

From The Beat: What made you mom resume talking to you, trusting you? What did you do/say? IS your life still a bit complicated? What is the next step in overcoming your drug/alcohol and stealing habit? Do you need a program? How committed are you to changing for the better? We'd love to hear more from you.

I'm Out

In forty-five minutes
I'm out of here for good
I wish I could
Why can't I?
Why am I scared to try out there
Where I have no control?
Where I don't know
What the world will bring?
Death and pain
Always cocaine
In my burned out veins
Killing my brain
In forty-five minutes I'm out
But for how long?
In reality I will be back
Like a fiend
Returning for a sack
Time and time again
I can't keep living this way
But what can I say?
Can't stop, won't stop
So don't stop
In forty-five minutes
I'm out

-Ash, Marin

From The Beat: You're a terrific poet. Your poems always go to the heart of your pain and confusion. You know cocaine is the big problem, so we suggest you get the help you need now! What or who can help you deal with whatever is wounding you so severely? Start with your counselor, your PO, your lawyer, or whomever you trust.

Watching The Sun Go Down

The time at the beach I like most is the afternoon, with the boys chillin', maybe a beer under the hot weather. Then we lay football, after dipping in the ocean for a little. Cook some carne asada (meat salad), eat, then relax. Talk to females; watch them. Nice view, huh? Yup. After all that, go back to a game of football and wait for the sun to set. Watch the sunset calmly, 'til it's all dark. Pack up everything, then take the road back home, feeling soothed.

I remember when I went to Hawaii—beautiful waters, clean and clear. I would go every day I was on the island. It was a coo' experience—the ladies, the restaurants, and the warm rain. I remember the whole experience.

-Kermit, Marin

From The Beat: Your writing is as soothing as the calm waters. We hope you get yourself back to such a state. We so appreciate the on topic writing, you write so vividly!

Complicated (My Life)

My life has been complicated for a very long time, because my brothers and my family are gang related and I been around them. Since I been twelve I wanted to be like them and I been in trouble for my gang a lot of times, but when I met my girl, I stopped the gangbanging. An' one day me and my brother both were together and I got tookin' to jail. And now here I am missin' my girl.

-Eduardo, Marin

From The Beat: Obviously the police didn't know you made a change in your life. Sadly, the police know you and see you and your family as trouble. What must you do to not have this happen again? We hope you get a chance back in the free world soon and you can get back to the finer things in life. What have you been doing to stay busy since you left your old lifestyle?

Como Mi Vida Se Me Complico

Se me complico cuando me dijeron los amigos que vendiera droga. Yo no les hecho la culpa a ellos porque nadie me amenazo para que lo hiciera.

Me gusto andar en la calle desde el primer día. Despues caí preso. Cuando estuve la primera vez en la juvenile, me puse a pensar en las cosas.

Aveces uno se hace ignorante aunque uno sepa lo que hyace.

Estuve 5 meses en la juvenile, me mandaron para un grupo y me gusto, pero siempre corri del grupo para volver a la calle. Y me volvieron a arrestar.

Ahora pienso diferente. Pienso en no volver a la calle. Ojala me dieran otra oportunidad de volver a un grupo para terminar mi probación, poder ir a la escuela y encontrar un trabajo para ayudar a mi familia como deseo hacerlo. Tambien voy a demostrar que no solo con drogas se puede hacer dinero y salir adelante con la vida que he caminado.

Yo vine desde Honduras para ayudar a mi familia pero ahora que me encuentro preso, me pongo a pensar en como termine en las drogas.

Cuando yo salga voy a trabajar para ayudar a mi familia y poder sacar mi vida adelante. Despues regresaré a Honduras a ver a mi familia. Tambien quiero gozar de mi libertad con mis mejores amigos.

From The Beat: Nos gusto la manera como aceptastes que fui tu error en haber tomado el camino que llebabas. ¿Qué pasara una vez que salgas con el amor que le tienes a la calle? ¿Si te llegaran a dar otra vez esta oportunidad que quieres crees que puedas conservarlo. Tienes mucha gente que depende de ti y es hora que empieces a tomar las cosas en serio porque si tu no ayudas a tu familia nadie lo hara por ti. ¿Estas bien seguro que cuando salgas vas a hacer las cosas que te has propuesto hacer? ¿Como lo haras?

How My Life Got So Complicated

It got complicated when my friends told me to sell drugs. I don't place the blame on them because no one threatened me to start doing it.

I liked being out on the streets since day one. Later on, I ended up getting locked up. When I was locked up in Juvenile for the first time, I started to think about things.

Sometimes, one makes him/herself ignorant, even though you know what you're doing.

I was in Juvenile for five months. They sent me to a Group Home and I liked it, but I always ran from the Group to return to the streets and they once again, placed me under arrest.

Now I think differently. I plan on not returning to the streets. Hopefully they give me another opportunity to go to a Group Home so I can finish my probation, be able to go to school, and find myself a job so I can help out my family the way I long to do so. I'm also going to show people that money can be made in different ways and not just through selling drugs and move forward with the life that I have walked.

I came from Honduras to help my family out, but now that I find myself locked up, I start to think about how I ended up involved with drugs.

When I get out, I am going to work so I can help my family out and be able to move my life forward. Then, I will go back to Honduras to see my family. I also want to enjoy my freedom with some of best friends.

-Elvin B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We liked the way you accepted the fact that it was your mistake for having chosen the path that you were on. What will happen once you get out with the love that you have for the streets? If they were to give you the opportunity that you want again, do you believe that you will be able maintain it? You have a lot of people that depend on you and it is time that you start to take things seriously because if you don't help your family out, no one will do it for you. Are you positive that when you're back on the outs, you're going to do the things that you have proposed on doing? How will you do it?

Days In Juvenile Hall

Days in Juvenile Hall
This is my 10th day
It feels like a year
Days feel like weeks
Weeks feel like months
What am I going to do
Damn I need a blunt
Some grapes would do
Me a good deed well
That not what I really need
What I really need is to
Go home with my family and
To be happy
Days in Juvenile Hall
Damn I hate starin' at these white walls
And wearing other females' drawers
Man , man, days in Juvenile Hall.

-Lil' Sexy GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Do you hate it enough to stay out of here for good? Even if you had that blunt you crave, would it really change anything about your situation, or would it just make it easier to take, and therefore harder to change your situation?

Secrets Hide

Smiles and frowns come up and down.
You think you have friends, but they're phony all around.
"Hey Jelly, what's up with you girl, you okay?"
But when I see you again, you 'don't even look ma way.
That's what I'm talking' 'bout. It's fake, unreal, just a sho'.
People keep their secrets and you'll think you know.
Well, I got a secret and I want everyone to hear.
Jelly's goin' home, see ya, and I'm outta here!
'Cause once I'm gone, I'm gone.
No more robbin' folks and singin' freedom songs.
I learned my lesson, do right and not wrong.

-Jelly GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We hope what you say is true, Jelly. We don't want to see you back up in here locked up and miserable! You have too much to offer for that.

I'm Me

People ask me who am I.
I am the sky
I am the ground
I am a child
I am an adult
To most people I am an out-of-control teen
that will not listen to nobody
To very little I am a teen that is an angel
that does nothing but good
I am a life
I am death
I am yesterday
I am a today
What I am...
I'm me
And I'm not going to change for nobody

-V-Time B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Everything changes, V-T, even you. Nobody can know what tomorrow will bring, and as tomorrow brings new experiences (and there are so many things you've never experienced), you will find yourself growing with new knowledge, and that will bring changes. You don't have to "change for nobody." You will change for yourself. The only question is, what kind of change is coming to you? We'd like you to read this piece again in a year, in two years, in five years, and see where you were and know where you're going. Life is change. And you are very much alive!

Pretend You're There

If you want to learn different perspectives, then read different books, because every different book is based on different perspectives. And put yourself in different positions, and pretend you're there.

-Meen B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Even two sentences can earn a standout designation when those sentence say something important. These do!

God's Gift . . . My Treasure!

This love that many have thrown away...
A display of ungratefulness...
Why waste your time? You're gutless...
You have no pride... Using people. Using me. Losing me.
Something so special for something so worthless?
How do you feel seeing me happy now?
So nonchalant in front of everybody...
You abandoned me so carelessly...
But I was found and loved! I'm treasured...
I'm in love with a beautiful girl...
Two people used and abused searching for each other for such a long...
Finally dug deep enough to find something special!
You're my treasure... what is more valuable than your heart and soul?
I never thought I'd fall in love...
Always wanted something I never thought I'd get,
Because every girl who ever claimed to love me was full of shhh!
But you... you've done more than enough to show me you love me,
Under no circumstances would you place someone above me.
A treasure you would die for
Must be worth everything to give your priceless life...
That's why I plan on staying until the end, by your side my wife!
Treasure of Gods... I wouldn't give you up for nothing!
Can't wait to have you back in my arms
I miss your loving!

-B Littles B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Love can be such a beautiful thing, fit for a queen and made for a king. And though at times pain is what it brings, we can't deny that most of the time it makes our hearts sing. Do you believe in love at first sight? Do you also believe that love brings you light? We think it can, but we still have one fear: Will this treasure you love keep you from here?

Lost Love

I made you cry and walk out that door
Just because I wanted to go to the block and be hardcore
You meant the world to me
But I didn't see it, and I felt I lost a part of me
You were always there when I needed you most
You cried for me when I almost ended on the East Coast
Tried to hide me when I was on the run
Play stupid to the cops when they thought I had blasted a gun
Every time we were together we kissed passionately
And you were a ride or die, and always stood by me
Mexican, Asian, and Black she was
Pretty, sexy, sweet, and smart
There for me when I needed love
Green eyes, light brown curly hair, and a beautiful smile
Curved in all the right places, big booty and could talk and walk a mile

-Lil' Shadow B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: the saddest thing about this sweet love poem is that you let your love for the block be more important than your love for her. That was a selfish choice you made, and now you're realizing just what you've lost. What happened to this person? Is she still in your life? If not, why? If so, will she be enough to keep you out of jail this time? If she's there to "ride or die," then you'll both end up as slaves. So we hope you use the good mind you obviously have to think seriously about what you're doing and what you want out of life. It would be wise to focus on you and what you need to do to keep "you" free.

Lost Love

One time I used to love somebody that I was going out with. I used to tell her that I love her and she said the same thing to me back. But one day I saw her with another guy and that got me so mad.

I used to do a lot of things that I have never done with my other girlfriends. I always hold her hand when we go out to places, always do things in front of people and I didn't care what other people say.

But when I saw her with that other guy, I let her go. That really hurt my feelings. That was the first time I felt that bad. I always used to tell her that I would never cheat on her, and she always used to say the same thing to me. But when we broke up she wanted to go out with me and I said I will never go out with a girl that hurt my feelings that bad.

-Lil' Flirt B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We can tell by what you wrote how special she was to you. All we can say is that we've all had this painful experience of losing the love of someone we thought loved us in the same way, and that it really hurts. The good thing about broken hearts, though, is that time (and new love) puts them back together. Thank you for sharing this with The Beat.

Shedding Tears

Look into my eyes and you'll see a lot of pain
Murders, drugs, and wanna-be's got me going insane
The last time I shed some tears it was June 9th
My cousin got stabbed earlier that night
They said he might not make it 'cause it was severe
That was the first time in eleven years that I shed a tear
The last time I did I was four years old
Because my homie who was five got shot in a crossfire by a snub nose
I try to be good and have a good life
But I wanted my respect so I jumped into that cholo life
Seven years doin' bad shhh
Robbery, stealing, and smashin' on suckas to get that grip

-Lil' Shadow B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Considering all the pain and murder in your eyes, why do you pursue a lifestyle that is full of nothing but more pain as well as things that you feel are driving you insane? Why don't you try to open up your eyes to things that are worth looking at such as your future and ways to stay out of jail and alive. If you get a chance to read a book called "There Are No Children Here," by Alex Kotlowitz, we think you'll find a lot of similarities between the life you describe and the life those in this book (written 15 years ago) went through. You can get it at the library. It's worth reading — and thinking about where your life is heading and where you want it to go.

Understanding My Choices

I think people might not understand me. Because they think just because I'm half white and look more white that I ain't been through shhh. Well I have been through more den most. I have been through a lot and I'm still messing up. That's why I wanna turn my life around. And start doing/being good so I could stop wasting time. And move on with my life so I will be understood if successful. And my actions can be understood because the choices will be made for a good reason.

-Mike B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It's interesting how people make judgments by outward appearances. Because a person is white, black, Asian, Latino that does not determine what's inside them or what they've experienced, so we are feeling you. What's more important than what other people perceive, though, is your own decision to change the picture and move towards becoming the person you really want to be. We applaud you for that. What's your plan for getting there?

I'll Keep Laughing

To keep it on the real, I laugh more than just most of the time. I stay laughing. My PO, the judge, my parents, they think me laughing is spitting in they faces saying, " I don't give a damn." They're wrong.

My laughter, my calm, is the only thing I have, next to anger, emotions that's acceptable to show. My laughter and my anger go hand in hand. Another court, another denial to leave this week-ass place where I can't even take a damn piss without permission. It's cool though, I'ma keep laughing, not 'cause I wanna be in here, but so everyone can see that no threat is going to scare me outta making the best outta my situation. I mean shhh, the best thing there is to looking forward in here is the next miserable day, so I pretty much ain't got shhh to lose.

-Anonymous B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You only have "shhh to lose" if you don't find a way to stay out of this place the next time you touch down. We understand exactly what you mean by laughter and anger going hand-in-hand, and we hope you are able to keep laughing, even when you feel like exploding. It may not make this place any better, but laughter can have the same effect on you as medicine that cures an infection. Focus on what you need to do not to come back, or you'll find yourself doing a lot more laughing when you are feeling like crying...

Misunderstood

Man, I see a lot of things different from what or how other people do. Yeah, a lot of people misunderstood me because I hate staying in the same spot or because I like to go places and see things. I be ready to go somewhere, you know, take a little break from the block. They will try scare me with the thought of, "You might be slipping."

No! Forget that! I'm gone. No beef is going to stop me from going off the block.

-Lil' Carl B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Where do you like to go when you take these little breaks from the block? Are you ever tempted never to go back?

No More Let Downs

Sorry I stress you out
Sorry for all the grief
Tired of causing you pain
Tired of this game
Ready to take the blame
Ready to change my ways
You give me hope, joy, and
Love.
You give me strength, encouragement
And time.
You try to be the best DAD...
And please believe you are!
Don't worry no more Dad
No more heart ache or
Let downs.
I love you, I just hope
You never stop giving your
Support and love.

-Bell, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Once you're ready to "take the blame" or admit fault, you have moved onto the next step of maturity. There's no use sitting around blaming others for your problems. Even if it is the fault of others, it doean't to you any good. Once we decide to take control of our own lives and our own decisions, we become more powerful people. And supportive parents always worry about their children and they always forgive them. Sounds like you have a pretty supportive parent.

Trashing My Treasure

I took livin' in the suburbs for granted. I kept trying to go back to my 'hood life when I should have just been good. Now I wanna do good when I should have been before. That was my treasure I took for granted.

-Mike B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Your treasure is not lost, Mike. You almost threw it away until you saw its real value. Now, don't let anyone turn you around. Whether they value what you value or not is not important. Let them treasure what they want. You know what is worth what...

Laughter

I laugh to make me feel better. It helps to bring me up instead of down. My sister Lisa, she has a sickness called lupus. The doctor says she has a couple months to live. My dad is going in a operation. The doctor told him there's a 50/50 chance he'll live or die. I don't now if I'm going to live back at home. My PO might put me in a group home. My mom has cancer. She's been sick for a long time.

My friend died a week ago. He got shot a month and three weeks ago and I laugh of all the memories I have with each one. No one could take that from me, not even myself. And I laugh for all the pain to go away. And if they're gone I'm still going to laugh because they would not want me to be sad. I know they would want me to have a smile on my face.

-Steven B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Damn, Steven, you are facing some very hard possible situations in your life, and you will have to be strong to endure what might be happening to your family. We understand why laughter sometimes is the only thing that can keep a person moving forward, so we think you are doing just right by facing the future (and the present) and keeping a smile anyway. We wish your family and all their problems good luck, and we wish the same for you!

My Treasure

I got a picture of my girlfriend that she was goin' throw away 'cause she said it was ugly, but to me it's not. I use that picture every time I think about her. Every time I think about her and start missing her, I take out her picture and look at it. I treasure that picture a lot because it means a lot to me.

-Michael B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You describe why this is a treasure to you very well (and also why your girlfriend did not treasure it). We hope this picture helps you through this difficult time in your life, and that soon you will be back with her. And that you will not lose your freedom again so that you won't have to rely on looking at pictures of her.

Misunderstood

Why do people misunderstand people. Because they don't like them or something, people think they better than others, but nobody is better then anyone else. Because people think bigger then others. Yet, when people tell other peoples secrets, that makes me mad. Because that's supposed to be a secret you're not supposed to tell nobody and that why people misunderstand other people. I really don't care what people think about me. Because I'm a bigga person. And I'm not a jealous person like other people.

Please don't misunderstand 'cause I said my name is Lady Nobody. I just don't want nobody to know who wrote this I got to go know, but I be back before you know it.

-Lady Nobody, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Why don't you want anyone to know who wrote this? You're not saying anything against anyone else, and in fact, your message is a really positive one. Don't talk about anyone behind their back and don't tell anyone else's secrets. That's keeping it real, right?

Behind The Laughter

Behind the laughter, well there is a friend of mine. I hang out with him most of the times. When we were at a party or something that with the other friends of ours, they make jokes about him that he fat. And those jokes make me sad, but I laugh to cover it up. Because I don't want my friends thinks I don't like to chill with them.

-Simon B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We admire you for speaking honestly about this, Simon. We think there are many people (maybe all of us) who sometimes join in laughing at others, even others that we like very much, because we want to be accepted. Maybe you should share this piece with your friend who the others laugh at so he can know that you really don't like it when they laugh at him. Maybe he needs to know that.

Remember This

What's good ya'll? I'm gon' tell ya'll a little something like before my pops died, he always told me, when you're doin' something, like a task or a job, he said, remember this sayin',"Do a job, big or small do it right, or don't do it at all."

RIP Pops. So I'm gon' use that when I get out. My job is to stay outta jail.

-Romell, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That's great advice. How do you plan to stay out of jail? We've got another saying for you, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Think about that one.

Laughter

I don't like it when a boy likes you, but tries to make fun of you or call you a bunch of names. Why don't they silly-ass just express their feelings?

I hate it when a boy tries to make you feel less of yourself so he thinks he is the only one. But a female always got another ninja on the side. A girl need to keep her shhh together, like match your panties and your bra get your shhh together. Girls need to keep themselves together, so boys won't have to talk about them.

Man I hate men that act like little-ass boys. Why can't they just grow up?

I think 'till I get my shhh together, I don't need no ninja, I need a man in my life, so grow up.

-Aleisha, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Aleisha, you're taking about having another guy in the side? That sounds kinda juvenile to us. If you want to get rid of lil boys and have relationships with men, men, who will treat you right and with respect, then you've got to be the kind of woman that these men want. You want to be respected, you better respect him. You want him to be faithful, you better be faithful to him – and so on. Get your shhh together, then you will be able to have a good relationship, till then, you may just be wasting your time and setting yourself up for a lot of senseless heartache. Peace.

Behind The Laughter Of My Baby Daddy!

Yes, I would because my BABBY DADDY said something that was stupid to me, but to him it was about our lil' girl, but I would feel the laughter come in my head and then I feel him get mad at me, get ready to hit me in the face and then ask if I am ok. Sometimes I then get up and leave that ninja. And for what he did to me and seeing him with another girl that made me mad at him.

-Jacqueline, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Jeez, why in the word would you be mad at your baby daddy for HITTING you or being seen with another girl. WAKE UP! This is not okay. The other girl thing might hurt, but hitting you is far worse. Is that the kind of example you want to set for your daughter, to see her mother get hit by her father!? Get out of that relationship and do it fast, get a restraining order if you can't make it last. Wake up girl!

NOT FUNNY

What are you laughing at, that ain't funny,
You act like you just seen the Easter Bunny,
Ha Ha Not funny,
Do you see something you like,
Like that movie that's on TV "Like Mike"?
What is it?
If you don't tell me what's so funny, I'm gonna have a fit.
I'm holding my laughter back, something keeps
Pulling me back,
Shut up, before there is going to be something on
Your face called a smack.
I'm tired of holding my feelings in,
I feel it's going to deep within.
I feel like all my problems are all in a big ole bin,
It can't come out,
I wanna just take off and shout,
That ain't funny,
It's really the feelings inside that make me wanna
Shout,
Ain't no stoppin',
You can't let nobody put you down, and you keep
Droppin',
Ha Ha Not funny

-Tabatha, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You're probably right, it's not funny. But it's not your problem either. Sometimes it's hard to ignore others, especially because teenagers have this funny thing about wanting to be up in other people's business. But rest assured that you all grow out of that and will just move on and live your own lives. So worry more about holding your problems in and storing them up. Worry about how to work through that, think about how you can try to get them out, whether it's writing or talking to someone. But don't worry what other people are doing and saying. They have their own problems they're storing up inside, they just cover it up by laughing at others.

One Person's Trash Is Another's Treasure

Ok I had a great, great, great, grandfather. He had this watch and was in the army. That watch went through hell. After that he gave it to his son. They went to king crab fishing and he died 'cause of a heart attack.

So my great, great granddad had the watch. He also joined the army, lost his left eye and ear. The 2nd time the watch went through hell again. So he gave it to my granddad and told him everything about the watch. How special it was and what it has been through. So my great granddad joined king crab fishing and lost his left arm with the shoulder. Then he fell overboard and died. So my granddad had it. He did the same thing my other granddaddies did. Join the army, then got hurt, then went to king crab fishing, but didn't die until after. Then gave the watch to my dad. After that he died of a heart attack. So my dad had it. He did the same thing. But he went to king crab fishing and tried to save some people 'cause the ship was on fire. Then the ship blew up and burned his left arm. But my dad didn't die.

So he gave the watch to me last year 'cause I'm known for losing things. So in the middle of the year I lost it. But check this out, if you really paid attention, everything that happened to everybody who had that watch had something happen to their left side. As for me, my left chest is bigger than my right 'cause I got a big heart.

-A Big Heart B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Damn! This sounds like a story from "The Twilight Zone." That watch sounds like it brought a whole lot of bad luck. We never thought we'd say this to anyone, but we're actually glad you're good at losing things! In what ways was this watch trash? In what ways was it a treasure? We really like hearing about old artifacts being passed down, so thank you for such a good piece.

Make New Memories

Sometimes I used to laugh with everybody around me for no reason. We would look at each other and start laughing for the hell of it. But I guess that's because we were all a little crazy from that sticky green.

That was the good days, when it used to feel like all the homies were kickin' it. Now it feels like everyone is either locked up or gone, and that makes me feel like that was the good days, but fahget it. That was then and this is now.

So now I'm just here in Juvy kickin' it. Well now I got to keep it coo'and try to mess up so I can get out and make new memories and go do what I used to do before, only this time we'll try to do things the smart way.

-Furcio, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That's perfect, you hit it exactly: you have good memories from the past, and then everything went to hell, and now you have to get out and make new memories. The only thing that worries us is when you say "do what I used to do before," because there is just no smart way to do stupid stuff. The Beat is more than 10 years old now, and we've seen too many people think that next time they can be more clever, more tricky. Then we see them back, in here. It turns out that the only ones who stay out are the ones who give up the old life entirely. Can you do that? Can you make new memories by turning over a new leaf?

I Love This Week's Topic

...because it's about laughter. And yes I do laugh most of my life just to cover up the stress, or even what I do through most of my life. Because if I just sit there and think about what I've been through, I'm scared I might just break down and start crying, or take my anger out on someone who has nothing to do with anything I'm going through.

For instance, most of my life I've been hurt by my mother or just forgotten for one of her boyfriends. My friends think I'm hella funny but if you put two and two together, it's all so that I won't have to think about the past, or what my brother goes through, like being in and out of jail multiple times as a young teen.

Now he's sixteen and he's right across the hall from me in another unit, and I'm only seventeen in this unit, even though this is my first time in jail and I hope my last. I don't know how he can do it, but I can't and I won't and I know his past life has probably affected him, but I hope it doesn't really start affecting me . I don't get visits, and no one on the outs answers my mail, especially my lady. I already have a hard time trusting females and especially for what my mother took me through.

If my brother reads this: try to stay out of jail for me, and change your life around. Cause eighteen is a big difference.

To my family. RIP Way Way Freddie, Franny, Charlie

-Lucon, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You have been through more in just 17 years than many people go through in their whole lives, and it's good to see that you know your own heart so well. That laughter can help keep you going through this hard time, and once you've pulled your own life together, you might even be able to help your brother. In the meantime – we're sorry to hear about the girl troubles. Remember though, that it's really hard to keep a relationship going when you're in jail. Stay out of jail and find a girl you can trust and be faithful to. (they're out there, we promise).

Laughter As Protection

I use laughter as a shield, especially when I'm locked up. Everyday I'm crying and hurting on the inside but I never show my feelings. Instead I try to tell jokes and laugh just to keep from feeling bad. Even when I'm alone and I feel like crying, I just start singing or think of some old school memories that make me smile and take my mind somewhere else. If I'm locked up or not, I will still laugh when things are going wrong because I feel like I have to stay strong. It could always be worse.

-Zeke, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thank you for being so honest. It's not easy to talk about our low moments and we thank you for having the courage to share with us. Laughter can be a great way to not get overwhelmed by our worries. Yes, there is a time and place for serious thought but there is also a time and place for all out goofiness so we get our minds off our mind. Keep laughing Zeke, just don't forget when it's time to turn the laughter down.

In This Place

In this place where I must be
Laughter and joy, you will not see
Waking up to a door with no key
Wanting to fly like a bird and be free
Feeling like Hell
In this lonely cell
Which is called jail
But with no bail
In Alameda County Juvenile Hall
Standing tall
Behind these walls
Caught up in the streets
For smoking methamphetamines
It's a tragedy
For choosing drugs over family
La Traviesa still stuck in the Game
Back up in here again
And that's a shame
Like Lil Rob
It's my natural high
Till the day I die
Loving to get crazy
Ain't no joke
Not no Coke
Big clouds of smoke
Smoking to the brain
And holding what I can contain
Trying to stay sane
In this cell
Which I remain

-Traviesa, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This piece rhymes and it's pretty creative, but are you really hearing what you are saying? It's a big tragedy! It doesn't have to be. What is preventing you from getting out of the Game? Is it your drug dependency? Do you think that you are the only one who feels trapped in the Game? There's got to be something better. If you really want to change you life, you'll make it happen. If not, you'll be writing these same words from the Pen, with regret. We know you are smart enough to change your life around; you just have to want to. Decide quickly, before it's too late. You can do it.

Laughing Is My Life

I usually laugh a lot, whether it's something funny or not, that's just the kind of person I am.

For example if I see a guy getting his butt whooped I would most likely laugh. I just like to laugh and have fun all the time.

Sometimes when I'm bored and have nothing else to do, I think of something funny so I can get a little laugh and giggle here and there. I don't know what kind of person that makes me but that's the kind of person I am. I guess this kind of makes me think about what I should or should not laugh at but hey, that's the kind of person I am.

-Bolo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Laughter is extremely important – the ability to laugh off things, big and small, can sometimes be the key to our sanity. However you bring up an interesting point at the end of your piece when you talk about taking into consideration what kinds of stuff you laugh at. Laughing at everything is not something that is out of your control. You are old enough to know when you should laugh and when you shouldn't; children sometimes have a hard time controlling themselves, not teenagers and certainly not grown men. Seeing someone get beat down isn't funny. So like the saying, "Think before you speak" your new motto should be "Think before you laugh."

In Juvenile Hall

So much pain in my teen years
Family dyin' but I fight back
The tears over the past two years
I overcame my fears
Guns poppin' shells
Dropping
That shhh hurt my ears
Bullets flyin'
Now I'm prayin' to God
Because ain't no telling when He gon' stop my years
But man
Anyway what's goin' on
Today they dropped Lil' Jay
But still they think it's ok
What type of shhh is that?
But it's all gon' come back
You ain't gotta live by the gat
It's getting too hot
That's why they doin' all that
It seem like we was just rappin'
The other day
The world seemed so ok
But you start messin' with gangs
And they took your life away
I dreamed of holdin a "k"
Thinking if I bust it
It will take the pain away
But now I learned that ain't the way
Getting full of that shhh
Ain't doin' nothin' but postin'
Livin' another day
Wonderin'
How the world go round
Thinking 'bout life outside the town (Oakland)
But that's when I was lost
Now I'm found
Lookin' around
I see nothin' but white on the wall
I wake up but I'm in Juvenile Hall
(RIP Lil' Jay) love you bra.

-Young Savage, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Young Savage, the life you talk about is way too hot. Now that you're not lost, which direction are you headed in? Can you see clearly? What would you become if you left Oakland and started a new life somewhere else? Is that something you would consider? Who do you look up to? Where will you be in five years? Young Savage, think about your life. If you spend most of your teenage years in the Hall, what will prevent you from spending your adulthood in prison? Only you can prevent it by the choices that you make now.

I'm Tired

I'm tired of being locked up cause this place is messed up but I put myself in here so I can't blame anybody but myself. I'm tired of being told when I can go to the bathroom, tired of being told when I can come out my room, tired of being tired of being here. I ain't coming back. Everyday the same mess, everywhere a ninja go we see the same old stuff.

Everybody who's a ninja knows they do the same old stuff.

Every time I open my eyes I see the same old stuff. WHAT'S GONE HAPPEN WHEN A NINJA DIES? IT'S GONE BE THE SAME OLE STUFF?

-Lil' Chad, 150 Crew

From The Beat: There is a lot of anger and frustration in this piece. A lot of people from the hood have low expectations – they don't expect much from people, they don't expect much from institutions like schools and hospitals, and they don't expect much to change. When things keep failing you, how do you find faith in them? We wish we had all the answers but we do know that if you have this attitude everything you said will remain true. If you place higher expectations on yourself and the people around you, don't expect the whole world to change. But it just might make things better.

Laugh At This

At one point all I wanted
Was to make people laugh.
It didn't matter
So long as we were not laughing at you.
But it came to a point where everything changed
And laughing wasn't a part of the game.
Suddenly you had to be real,
Always keep a straight face.
You laugh and you would
Get taken out of place,
Sent back to the room
Where it's you alone.
You think about laughing
But you can't
'Cause you just want to cry.
You want to laugh
But in the middle of the laughing
All you wish is that you could die.
When you're locked up
There is nothing you can laugh at
And there is nothing that can scare you.

-D-Easy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You take us on a dark journey through passage from boy to man in the game. The longer you play, the more seriously you start to take it, and suddenly all the little things that you took for granted, like laughing, are snatched away. Some big things can get snatched away too like your freedom and piece of mind. We are always hearting stories about the game but we haven't heard one yet that has a happy ending. We wonder what that says about the game?

Letting Go Of A Good Thing

Something that I threw away that I didn't treasure was not so much a thing as it was a person. It was this girl that I did not really care about and this other person really wanted to be with her so one day I was off to meet up with another girl. The girl I didn't really like was getting on my nerves so I told her it was over. She tried to get me to change my mind but I was like I'm coo.

I went to go meat this other girl but when I got there she didn't look like how she sounded on the phone. Three months went by and I saw the girl I broke up with out with the dude who I mentioned had liked her. She was looking good so I went up to her and she was all coo', not made or nothing. I told her how nice she looked and she was like, "Thank you." But she wasn't wit' me no more. You know what they say – there's more fish in the sea.

-Stoneface, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is a hell of a lesson that we should all be so lucky to learn early. You took someone nice for granted, thought you had found someone better and without really thinking cut her loose. When you are dealing with people's feelings, you have to be more thoughtful. And more importantly, karma is a you know what.

Why

Why do I choose to commit crimes?
Why do I choose to have my freedom taken away?
Why do I choose to wear the next man's shoes, socks, underwear and shirts?
Why do I choose to be behind these white walls?
Why do I choose to have a total stranger tell me what to do?
I tell you why because I am another teen statistic who refuses to prove people wrong.

-Keem, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Sounds like you just changed your mind, and next time you WILL prove them wrong. You can choose to become a new statistic, the high-achieving, A-student, college bound responsible son, friend, brother and boyfriend. Take The Beat along on your journey, and share with us your transformation.

Dream of A Way

as i lie in a cell locked up in a cage
feeling the pain of rage
isn't it strange how in yo' mind
it feels like you're going insane
lying on your bed dreaming a way
out of sorrow out of pain
in misery that you put to your family
so you think of a way to change

-Chedda B, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Hey, who knew you could write this way? This is a terrific poem you just laid down on the page! Thanks for a poem that goes deep, for our readers to cut out, paste up, and keep.

Time Gets Hard

Time gets hard when you're stripped from your freedom
It gets hard when the only things that hear you cry
Are your four walls that keeps you in
Time gets hard when you can only see Moma and Pops
For however long they allow you to
It gets hard when your surroundings is a
Bunch of people in baby blue shirts
Time gets hard when you must have a counselor's permission
For every single thing you do
It gets hard when you make a call to one of your boys
And you hear all your other homies in the background
Having fun on a summer night
That's when time gets hard

-Franklin B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: These are hard times and we hate to see you going through them. What usually helps us when things get like this is to focus on the fact that they can only get better from here. What are you looking forward to when you get out? What will be the first thing you'll want to do? What changes will you make to avoid these hard times in the future?

Cherish Things

Some people take life for granted and don't know that there's somebody who didn't wake up this morning, or there's somebody who don't have hands to eat with. Whatever it is, people need to learn to cherish things while you got it.

There's an old saying that goes, "One person's trash is another person's treasure." For example, there are some people in this world who don't have a mom, or some people who just have a dad, and there are just some people who don't have neither — so if you do have both of your parents, cherish it. Real talk, 'cause one day they gon' be gone; and when they gone, it's gon' hurt. It's gon' hurt real bad.

-JJ, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It seems like there's no way to protect ourselves from feeling hurt, but as you say, we can learn to cherish what we love, and especially those we love while they're still around to appreciate it. In a way, it's the greatest gift there is, learning how to cherish things you have in your life just as it is. For sure, there'd be less jealousy and hate, probably less crime and hurt, less self-destructive behavior to try to fill the hole inside where the love should be.

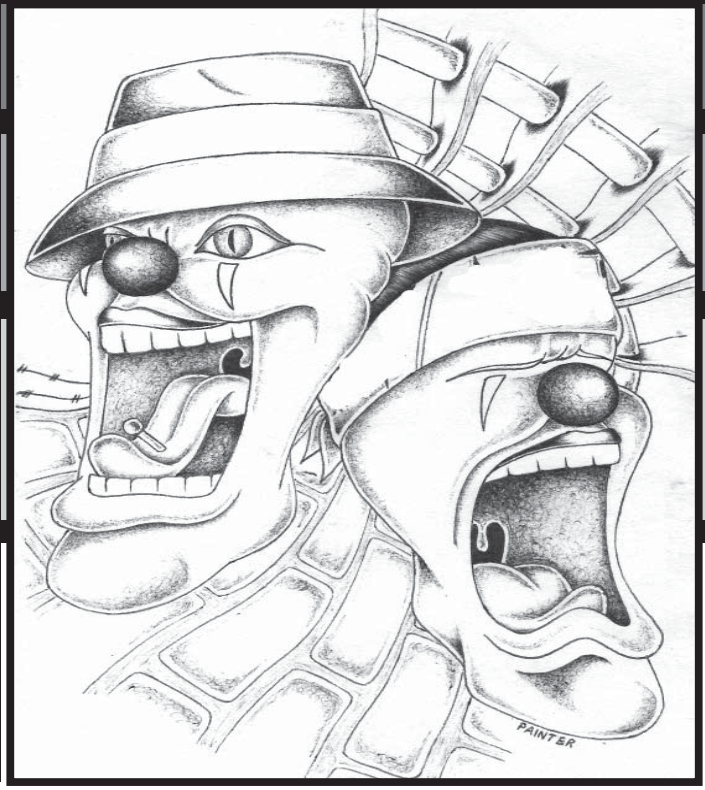
My Attitude

There's one thing that I need to get control over in my life besides my freedom, and that's my attitude. Sometimes I really try to get control over myself, but I just keep it going, going, going like the Energizer Bunny. Maybe I need anger management.

Maybe I do but I've already got a head start because since I'm part of the problem I'm part of the solution. But I do, I do, I do... need some help.

-Reese-C-Cup B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Don't worry about it. Everyone needs help — but not everyone is willing to say so. Are there ways that The Beat can help you? If there are let us know and we'll let you know if we can pull it off. But until then, let us know how 'controlling yourself' is going.



Treasure Life

i wish my life was filled with treasure
it wouldn't be so hard
that's why all my squad's in jail
because we look for money in the wrong way and place
that's why we are hungry
we never really had nothing in life
we just wake up everyday with a new hustle
that's why i say what I say every time
this life we live is not so kind
we end up in jail or left in hell
waiting for mom and dad to come bail
but what do we do when we get in that room
we bang on the door and act a fool
and in our hearts we say to ourselves
why mom isn't rich as hell, or
why didn't i go to school instead of jail
but it's not over
we can do it over
so to all my squad and every other reader
we still young enough to make a change
so let's make it

-Sunny D, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We're becoming Sunny D fans, 'cause you know how to face the truth and take a stand. You are still younger than many in here, and the earlier you can see your way clear to change your ways, the earlier you'll find real success coming your way. Hey, we now you've got what it takes, but you'll need to stay determined even when you get bad breaks. No more reacting by act

What It Do Beat

This Young Jeff up here in weak ol' B5. I'm just here waitin' to go to tha Ranch and knock my time out so I could go back home and take care of my daughter 'cause she needs me right now. But I'm just writin' to let y'all know, feel me?

Plus, I got a plan when I get out to never return 'cause nowadays they have jobs for young ninjas like me that just do nothin' but hang on da block all day sellin'. You know what, just doin' my thang so 'bout time I get out of tha ranch my mind gon' be set on something positive 'cause that's what seven months a do to you.

I been in and out of here since I been 11 years old. Now it's time to make a change. So there you have it.

-Young Jeff B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You don't have to be physically free for your mind to be set on something positive. But it's uplifting to know that you want a change. You're absolutely right, you're daughter needs you. Not your words of love, but you. So do your time and stick to your plan.

Cover Up

there's many different reasons people laugh
they could be happy mad nervous or even sad
and just not wanna show it at that time
they tryin'a let them real emotions go and hide
they think they got it all covered up in their minds
they think they can and i'm blind
like i don't know what's happenin'
he afraid but he tryin'a kick them feelin's by laughin'
me i could just straight kick my feelin's by rappin'
that's why i don't really resort to kickin' or slappin'
but if he wants i could slap him
wit' my pencil and pad 'till he cryin' and draggin'
while he movin' and steppin'
ain't gotta do physical damage
i could but i'd rather use music as my weapon
it hurts more
it leaves scars
you could never get rid of
from now on if you angry instead of laughin' just hit him
don't act fake cover up and try to hide stuff
'cause it ain't cool to
i'll let you know that laugh ain't helpin' i could still see through you

-Buddamilk, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We see your skill at rappin' also give you a way of letting your feelin's happen, come out on the page with your rage or joy or sadness. But now when you tell our readers to "just hit him", we'd agree that's the right thing to do wit' him only if you mean with a line of verse, 'cause physical violence every time you get mad will only make a life go from bad to worse. We'd say it's better to laugh and walk away, than to let some fools so deep in your dome you got to swing at what they say.

So I Laugh

When I laugh it don't have to be funny stuff. I used to laugh at the fact that when I was little I used to eat sugar sandwiches for lunch and dinner. I came up rough, grimy. But sometimes I laugh at the fact because it makes me feel better about myself now that I can eat just about anything I want on the outs. It's just a good feeling to come up from nothing to a whole lot.

I look back at it like, damn, eatin' cereal with no milk, sometimes water (sink water), peanut butter and syrup sandwiches. Laughin' these facts cover up the hardships of the time, the emotions I had that messed me up. It was bad, but that was then, this is now, so I laugh.

-FG B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We're glad you can laugh about those things now because they clearly were very painful at the time. When we grow up with nothing, we usually learn to appreciate things more than others. What do you appreciate now that you aren't eating sugar sandwiches?

If You Knew

if you'd seen what i've become
would it make you want to run
would it make you want to scream
would you wish it was just a dream
if you knew that you don't scare me
would it make you start to fear
would it make your heart beat fast
would you be sorry about the past
if you knew what i'm about
would it make you start to doubt
would you repent from your sin
would it corrupt you from within
if you saw how it would end
would you choose to break or bend
would you think it was strange
would you ever choose to change

- Negro, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What have you become, that it would make someone want to run? Maybe it's you who needs to change, not from fear but with your brain see through this brutal life that gives and takes only more pain. Everyone can find a reason to grudge the past, but why make something negative last so long, whether or not it was you in the wrong? Why talk about who bends or breaks when it's a cycle of pain you continually make? It's your own peace of mind and your future life that's at stake — this incessant belligerence will insure pain's return deliverance.

I Don't Understand

Sometimes I feel that I'm least understood by all, everyone, even by me, myself. Like for instance, something could be goin' through my mind, and at the same time I don't know what's goin' through my mind. Or like sometimes people will say something that's like evil or something, and I would just get all religious out of nowhere — and then I, myself, will be like, "What the flip did I just say?" But I guess it's just like with something I say and do.

You gotta know what I been through to understand me; like sometimes I get mood swings; like I will just be all quiet one minute, and the next minute you'll say something to me while I'm in the wrong mood and I'll be like, "What! You get the funk out my face 'fore I swing!" Like if I think about some of the stuff I been through, I be lookin' for something or someone to take it out on!

Sometimes I be feelin' sorry for some people we do bad things to, and my ninjas be like, "What the flip is wrong wit' you?" And then I'll go out one day with something on my mind on one of our knockout missions, and my ninjas be like, "Should I take off on this ninja?" And before they get a chance, without a word, bam! And I'll just fire on the ninja and keep walkin'! And my ninjas will be like, "What the funk is wrong wit' you?" And I'll just keep goin', like nothing happened. I guess it has to do with my mind, but I really don't understand.

-Chop, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Frankly, it sounds like poor impulse control when you're in certain moods. Knowing that, you need to put in some work on gaining more control over yourself at those times. You need to learn how to recognize signs of it before it bursts out in some violent and inappropriate way, 'cause it will do you in. Consciously, it seems like maintain good intent. Like that religious stuff that comes out of your mouth, it makes sense to you conscious mind, or maybe it's less like "makes sense" than like that's who you would prefer to be ... a good person who acts in the spirit of love, doing God's good will on earth. But then, all this stuff has happened to you in your life and has actually "traumatized" you, and it comes bursting out when you're in a "mood". The thing is that the moods are justified, but not the acting out. With practice you can tell yourself it's just a feeling. It's like when you learn to recognize your feelings, you can open the front door, welcome that feeling in, and then open the back door and let it go. Just remember it's only a feeling and you don't have to act on it. Writing about what's happened to you may help you understand your feelings better, but you need to be careful, 'cause it can also trigger those feelings — which is not so bad unless you act out behind those feelings, like you say you do.

This Girl (aka Cheating) Part Three

Ring! Ring!
Jt: Hello.
Girl: Hey.
Jt: Oh. What's up?
Girl: Nothing. What are you doin' tonight?
Jt: Why are the funk you askin'?
Girl: Because I was just wonderin': Would you like to come over tonight?
Jt: I'm cool. I have something to do.
Girl: Please.
Jt: Girl, have you forgot what the funk you did? You can't just do something, and me find out about it, and think it's all good.
Girl: I said I was sorry.
JT: Sorry, sorry, sorry — that doesn't change what you've done to me.
Girl: I know.
Jt: What if I had done that to you? You would feel the same way I feel.
Girl: Can you please just come over so we can talk about this?
Jt: This better be good! I'll be there in twenty-five minutes, at the most.
Girl: Okay.
Jt: Knock! Knock! Knock!
Girl: Who is it?
Jt: Open the door. You know it's me, unless you had another ninja comin' over.
Girl: Funk you.
Jt: I don't have time for this! I'm gone.
Girl: No, please stay. I'm sorry.
Jt: Are you gonna move away from the doorway so I can come in?
Girl: Do you want something to drink?
Jt: What do you have to say to me?
Girl: Listen, baby, I'm sorry. And I never meant to hurt your feelin's the way I did. You have never done anything wrong to me. You ain't never did anything but put a smile on my face. Baby, the truth is, I can't live without you bein' by my side. You have set my soul free! Do you know the real reason why I cheated? Well, I thought you was going to do me like all them other dudes did. I ain't never been in love like this, and I think I'm scared of getting my heart broken by someone else.
Jt: Say no more. I told you before we even started going out that I was a faithful guy, and that I was ready to settle down and have some kids and, someday, marry you. But I see all of that backfired on me.
Girl: Can you please stop yellin'?
Jt: Listen to me! I love you with all of my heart, but what you did was out of line. Now look at me, sitting here heartbroken and feelin's hurt. You really were the person that set my soul free. You were the person that made me whole.
Girl: Baby, we can work this out.
Jt: No, we can't.
Girl: Please, don't leave me!
Jt: Stop crying.
Girl: Please, just hug me!
Jt: Come here, baby. As of right now, we are no longer together. We need to give ourselves time. You need to find out what you really want.
Girl: I want you!
Jt: Well, you haven't showed me that. I really don't know what I want right now.
Girl: So are you saying we should date other people and still be friends?
Jt: Yes, that's what I'm saying.
Girl: But, why?
Jt: Look, I gotta go.
Girl: Don't leave, please!
Jt: Call me whenever you're ready.
Girl: But I'm ready now.
Jt: Like I said, call me sometime.
Girl: Please don't go! Please don't go, JT! Come back!
Sceeert! In my car, I left.
(to be continued)

-Lil' Jt, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The ongoing saga of love gone wrong, the pain and the fall out from betrayal and the poison it plants at the heart of true love. Still, it sounds as if you are punishing her for having betrayed you, and that once you feel satisfied that she's tasted some of the pain she dealt you, that you'll be ready to resume a relationship that seems to have deep love for the other on both sides. Or, perhaps your trust has been broken forever. You tell us that you don't know what you want or how you feel, other than hurt and in love. But if your trust is gone it's as if fear on her part (if she's telling the truth) made things go wrong and fear on your part (your fear of being hurt again) will seal the deal — which would be a shame since there seems to be a whole lot of love here. Fear is the enemy of love, and so is revenge. We know that whatever happens, you will follow your heart.

I Don't Have The Answers

Sometimes when I'm sittin' in the room and start thinking about why do I always get upset, frustrated at lil' things, I really do not have an answer. Some people say that I'm really sensitive or temperamental. It's not that I cry a lot, it's just that I always like to be right and have shhh my way or no way.

Yes, it is kinda immature in a way. Yes, I need to break that habit and be open-minded. It's just that I'm competitive in everything that I do. Sometimes when people prove me wrong and I know I'm wrong I still try to debate the situation to make myself right. I guess you can say it's just a bad habit.

-Reese-C-Cup B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We see a wonderful paradox in this piece, Reese, and that is this: By admitting that you are "kinda immature in a way," you're actually being very mature! Does that make sense? (We know truly immature people who could never admit they are immature because — guess what — they're too immature to admit it!) Of course it's good to be open-minded, but there's also something to say about sticking with your beliefs (unless you're just being stubborn). Are you trying to work on changing any of these traits? How?

Coming Up in the 'Hood

growing up in the 'hood ain't easy
see yo' boys get got
thank god that it wasn't me
i do all the things oh-gees do
to get money
i know it ain't right
i ask god to help me
to change my thinking
from all the wrong i did
i got to change my ways
'cause i got a little girl on the way
i hope she don't do the things i did
in and out the hall like i did
have a messed-up life like i did
i pray my baby don't end up that way

-D-Nuts, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Pray like it all depends on God and act like it all depends on you, if you want your baby to have a childhood better than you got — 'cause she needs a daddy to show her what to do and what not. Yeah, you got to change. You need new playgrounds, playmates and playthings, so your little baby can have better things — and the best of all, is a daddy no longer down by law.

Difference In Me

Difference in me is the ignorance that I hold for so long,
now that I try to work on.
I see myself making a change
that in the past I didn't rearrange
to the fact that I had a problem to solve with a solution.
Obstacles come chasing my way
as I face them instead of running away.
I express myself with feelings and thoughts that ought to be heard
by the ones who feel the same,
feeling incarcerated with this lonely pain.
The love feels near now that I got help,
but worry about the verbs and nouns around me that I see to learn
from the trust and respect I tend to earn
inside my heart still tends to burn.
The knowledge I have somewhat helpful I see that I take in more to learn
and use the brains I have... I stopped putting it to work,
but I am more than it's worth.
The past I left behind
but somewhat trying to see not blind
I have reflected on my life and have changed the present moment to a better start.
The start that starts with what comes first not last and that's me.
The better things and personality
that I have now new life, new beginning, new me, new attitude.
The small kindness I get from someone makes a big difference within me.
'Cause I usually ignore it when I was a mask, a mask that wasn't me
to care and feel love and kindness from someone...
but now that I have it with the real feelings I got sober and clean
it's a big difference in me.

-Lil' Payasa, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: Really nice poem, Lil' Payasa. We especially like the last part that shows what a difference being clean and sober can make in a person. Keep it up!

Filled With Sorrow

my heart is filled with sorrow
having horrible dreams will i wake tomorrow
why is our people filled with hate
will i get out of this place
what will be my faith
everywhere i turn i see ignorance
every night i beg god for deliverance
man this life is hard
it can leave you physically and mentally scarred
everyday somebody tries to prove that they are hard
but that's how it is behind bars
that's why i stay on guard
will I change my life.
i'm tired of living this hype
i need somebody to help me do right
sometimes i cry at night
when i get out will my ninjas still be tight
when will i see the light
i will try to change with all my might

-Wayne, 150 Crew

From The Beat: They say you have to change your playgrounds, playmates and playthings, if you really want a change to begin to take root. You can't expect your old friends to follow suit, and you can't wait for them to follow you. The someone you need to help you do right, is yourself. Whatever other help you do or don't get, that's the most important help you can get — and it starts at the front end: Making hard decisions about what you will do and who are your friends. And when you slip back, just get right back on track — 'cause jails, hospitals and death are the alternative, for a fact!

A Letter to Everybody

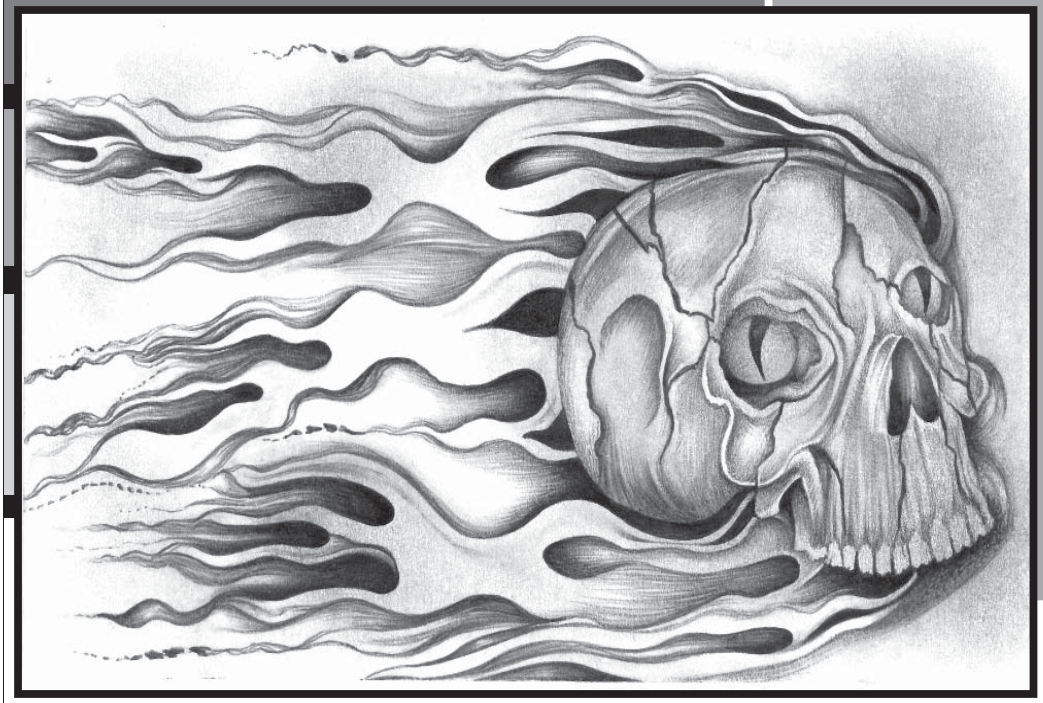
I got my GED, and I'm proud of it. So everybody guess what? Don't give up! It's easy. It's never too late. Keep going, it's great to have a GED!

I decided to make my mind up and do right, make my family feel proud of me. But guess what? Don't do it for your family — do it for you! So you can live successfully, keep going to school. It don't stop! That's where the real money at, all the females. Whatever you want, it can happen. Trust me, I know — and you know. So keep it up and stay out the jail house!

I got a few more months and I'm out! When I go back home, still do my thang, because it's in my blood. But don't get me wrong, I'm going to school. On the side, probably try to make it out the way, 'cause I got my GED so I know I can make it! Keep going, it's okay to shake them dreads. Go, go dumb! Shake them muthafunkas!

-Lil' Lazy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Major props on getting your GED! We always knew you had the ability, but until you wanted it enough to work for it, it wasn't gonna happen. Now it's reality, Lil' Lazy got his GED! Major props for making your own personal history! A whole lot more jobs are now possible for you to get, but they won't just happen — you still have to want it enough to put in the work (and we're not talking about on the street corner, not even on the side — or all your hopes will turn into disappointments and lies as you get caught up again to do more time, or catch a bullet and die). You're on the right road, so shake them dreads like whoa!



My Laugh, My Hurt.

I have enough pain to cry a river but never will I show my real emotion to my family. It's my job to be strong for James, Estelle, and Michelle. I need them just as much as they need me, but me being strong gives them a chance to be kids

-Saralynn, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's not fair is it. Sometimes the oldest sibling ends up taking on the role of a parent, either because the parent has to work so much to support the family, or for less savory reasons. But you're right that you have to be strong for them, and really that makes you strong for you too. But you have to know that it's alright to cry and that you can even cry in front of them if you have to – it won't make them love you any less. But don't bottle it all up inside or it will really make you sick.

Tryna Stack A Million

Tryna stack a mill
Growing up in the hood
Opened my eyes early to see the real
Hanging out, drinking bottles but
Never popped a pill
Aside from all that
I was on the corner selling crack
Not caring about nobody just tryna
Stack a few racks
Where I really messed up at was not
Going to school
Cutting class to rob lockers
And thinking it was cool
Taking whatever I had to start stackin'
My mill
Not tripping off the possibility of maybe
Getting killed
Robbing who ever I had to
Keep my pockets filled
Telling myself "I'm a hustla and
Man I gotta eat
So I was getting off on any female
That wanted to beef
Never really had time to fight
I was too busy on my grind
Day and night
Now I see where it got me
Reminiscing on all the crazy shhh
I had to see
And wondering if I had done it differently
Where would I be?
But NO I was too busy
Tryna stack a mill
Never thought I'd get caught or
Go to jail
Now my mom paying my debts
And juvenile hall bill
All because I was tryna stack a mill

-Iyshawn, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It sounds like you're talking about someone else. It's hard to believe that someone with as much insight and internal power could let herself go so far astray. We hope this was just an obstacle on your way to a more knowledgeable place. You had to understand what it was like before you could choose the right path (and lead others to it). So tell us, what is your plan upon leaving juvenile hall? We hope someday soon you can repay your mom for your poor choices and make her proud!

Her Trash My Treasures, My Trash My Treasure, Ones Persons Trash Is Another Persons Treasure

I have a sister who feels that she can come and go out of her children's life she throws them away like garbage. I just wish she could see her babies like I see her babies. They're gorgeous, special, talented, their smiles light up the room. I love those children with unconditional love. So I guess you can say that my sister's "trash" has become gods gift to me. They are very truly my treasures.

Yet don't get me wrong. I threw out my boyfriend Frank like yesterday's trash but the moment he was gone I realized just how truly I loved him, I luckily received him back and once I finish school were planning to get married. This time I got lucky.

My trash became my treasure I love you Rankie, and even though James, Estelle And Michelle Mommy's not there, your Auntie will always be.

-Saralynn, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Let's hope your sister will one day realize, like you did with Frank, that her children who she is treating like trash are actually her biggest treasure. But we can't hold out breath waiting for that, so you need to keep picking up her slack and loving those kids as much as you can – and setting a good example for them! They already have enough negativity around them it sounds like. We bet they need their auntie pretty bad, and can't imagine how disappointed they are when they ask about you and hear that you're in jail. Where are the children now?

I never thought the day would come
That I'd be sitting in the hall
Waiting for visiting day or a PO call

Bad Dream

I feel like I'm trapped in a dream
And I can't wake up
Like I've been through stuff
That you'd never think of
I'm trying my best to wake myself up
Out of this dream
I run and I pout and I shout
And I scream
Somebody please help me
I just want to be a changed lady
I know tomorrows not promised
But it's a real big maybe
You don't know how hard it is
Hoping for a release
Day to day
I never thought the day would come
That I'd be sitting in the hall
Waiting for visiting day or a PO call
I don't know when but somewhere
In my life I made the wrong turn
Now I'm sitting in this cell
Slowly watching my soul burn
I don't know if this is real
But I think it might be
Maybe its not and I'll wake up
Out of this bad dream

-Iyshawn, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's certainly not too late! You may have made a detour, but we can tell you are back on the right track. Just keep practicing what you preach, and not only will you be done with jail before long, you'll be a leader for your friends and your community. Just hold tight and remember to follow your own advice.

. . .my sister's "trash" has become gods gift to me. They are very truly my treasures.

What Did I Do?

i ask myself what did i do
because i don't ever know why they mess with me
what did i do
why can't i be free with you
you be far away on the spot
where they call it "the block"
and you know i'm locked
you say i'm too young right now
but i ain't no coward
i get abused by the police because i'm black
that's not an excuse
i sit on the back of the bus
we belong with you
you belong with us
so i cry inside and ask god why
you are so mean and you can't see
how it feels to be me
so tell me what did i do

-Choyce, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You can't play by the rules you learn from the street and expect to stay free. And the rules that govern the rest of society may seem foreign, unfamiliar and unfair — but even if it's like learning a foreign language, you've got to get rid of all that mental baggage the street has you thinking is just who you are. 'Cause who you were raised to be is not necessarily who you need to be, 'cause the street raised you to go to prison or die young on a mission. You've got to rise above the police as well as the thugs on the corner of the street and get a legal j-o-b to stay free. It's okay to ask God why it has to be, but it's crucial to ask yourself what you need to learn in order to stay free.

i cry inside and ask god why
you are so mean
and you can't see
how it feels to be me

I

as i walk through the shadow of death
i fear no man
because the lord give me the strength
to live another day
may i have the power
to push all evil out of my way
my tears are uncontrollable
there's no way i can stop them
but lord let me be a living witness
'cause i know there's a way
even when all hope is gone
there's a feeling within
that keep' me up and running
and that is why i know
i am here to do something
lord says i know i'm blessed
just 'cause i'm here today
and i have to believe
things will get better
so today i believe
and i'm sure i will achieve
as i walk through the shadow of death
i fear no man
'cause god is with me

-Choyce, 150 Crew

From The Beat: There is one man to fear, and that is yourself, 'cause you the only one who can choose what you will do next. Will you walk on God's path as step by step you march onward toward your goals, or will your pain and anger explode and blow you way off the road that leads to your happiness. Be true to yourself, and by God you will be blessed (but there's always another test, so — just do your best).

All Type of Laughter

laughing at you
laughing with you
laughing about you
but i laugh at myself sometime too
for messin' up
but i don't like when people
laugh at me when it nothing funny
but we all have to laugh

-Choyce, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Cruel laughter is a vicious weapon, but inclusive laughter is a precious possession and teaches an important lesson — we all make mistakes when we do what we're doing, but when errors are viewed as both endearing and human, it helps us get back to what we need to be doing.

The Closer I Get

the closer i get to my dreams
the more i start to believe
believe in my goals that i will achieve
achieve what god meant for me
i know there's a job just for me
the closer i let people get to me
the more they get over on me
but the closer i am to believing
something or someone fails me
but the closer i get to my dreams
the more i start to believe

-Choyce, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It sounds complicated. Really every path to your goals will have setbacks along the way, something will at some point always go wrong, and there will always be someone who disappoints you — but some things will go right, and someone else will come through. So keep pursuing your dreams, and makes sure that when you believe in yourself, you come through; 'cause the one you most need to believe in, is you!

Who I Am

What it do, my name is Weez. That's my nickname and the streets I live on in Oakland . I moved last week and now I live in Berkeley. I'm a good person, I stay out of the streets. I have a little brother his name is Tweetz. That's his nickname. I go to school.

-Wezz

From The Beat: Nice to meet you Weez, and welcome to our pages. You may be gone by the time you print, but if you're not, tell us more about yourself. Is Berkelely easier to deal with than Oakland? Are you and your brother staying out of trouble?

My Love For Her

My love for her is so strong,
I feel like a man when she's around.
My love for her is different from all of the other girls I love.
My love for her is so powerful,
More powerful than anyone can imagine.
My love for her is to be known.
Why is it like this?
If she left me my life will be over.
It's so hard to find out that love is good in so many ways.
So my love for her is like a dream come true.

-Iggy

From The Beat: It sounds like you really care very deeply for this young woman. Let us remind you though that if things didn't work out, you would feel like life was over but life, in fact, would NOT be over. This is what love does to us, for better or worse. You are young and still have a lot of growing to do so be sure in invest as much time as you do in this relationship to as you do to developing yourself. No relationship will last if the people on it aren't happy with themselves.

Funny Face

I sometimes laugh or smile for what may seem like no reason. It's become a habit; I think it mostly comes from me as a kid not wanting to look anti-social at school.

I always smile around my friends' parents when I go in their house because a lot of my friends are Asian and their parents don't have the best impression of African Americans. I try to appear friendly all the time.

-Dwayne

From The Beat: Funny how such a good habit can come out of a not so great place like feeling awkward at school, something we have all gone through. You are a smart, interesting young man. Being all smiles probably won't change the way your friends' parents think of black people but showing them who you are, good and bad, has a better shot.

What I Have Learned

I smoke hella weed; my moms already knows that I smoke a lot because I would come in everyday zooted, smelling like it with eyes looking like laser beams.

I used to lie and say my allergies were bothering me but she knew damn well it wasn't my allergies. I used to come in with the munchies everyday. I use to come and slam any and everything I saw. She got tired of going grocery shopping every other week so she started hiding stuff from me.

One day I came home hella high, stumbling and all. She saw me, looked me straight in the eyes and said, "Why would you smoke some mess that could kill you?" I was on the silent treatment. I had no answer for her. But now I do!!!

-Lil Dewey

From The Beat: After reading this, we one only have one question – what answer would you give your mom now? If the answer is something along the lines of, "Sorry mom. I was lost and foolish but know that life has more to offer me than temporary relief from pain and stress," we would be cool with that. If it is something like, "Trees aren't that bad for you and I am almost a grown man who should be allowed to do what I want," then you are wasting her time and your own.

I Feel Good When I Laugh

How do I feel you will laugh?

Me, I feel good. I forget about everything that's going on around me. I'm that kind of person that smiles when I'm mad. I like to hide my feelings bcause I like to be in the right state of mind. That's why I always got so much stuff built inside of me.

But being here in Juvenile Hall there's realy nothing to laugh you locked up, you can't go home. So me when I'm around ninjas I know in here, we all just sit and talk about hella shhh. That's whey I last this long up in here.

So to all that read this, keep yo' head up and when we get up out of here, get you shhh in order. And don't come back.

-Lv

From The Beat: Good advice right there. It's true, we see you in the here and you always seem to be struggling between laughter and sadness. It's good that even though you hide your feelings in conversation you always manage to express them on paper. The fact that you can do that might help you deal with stresses when you get out. Will you continue writing when you go home?

This Life Of Mine

I thought you was my friend but you went against the game
But now I see all you wanted was fame
That was some fake shhh you did
Hollerin' that grown man shhh but telling like a kid
Through my eyes I couldn't see
Why my own friend want to hate on me
I thought we was better than that
We been through thick and thin
After all you was a fake ass friend
Hollerin' this an that, "I'm real"
I told that was that pill
To all my readers that's in a pack, click or gang
And you got to do that shhh that ain't you to hang
forget that shhh
You ain't gon' get rich
Once y'all do some dirt somone gon' snitch
Don't show too much love to yo' friends
'cause they would use it against you to the end
it took me a long time but now I see
why God said hate your neighbor an' love yo' enemy
when I get out I'm a live a better life
because all young balcks got to fight
to get off the street an' got to school
going straight to the block thinking that's cool
but it's really gon' hurt in the long run
I go see where you at when the time comes
When that dop shhh over what you gon' do?
And ain't got no money to buy a pair of shoes
You gon' ask the white man for a job,
what you gone be -- a lawyer or a cop?
Then they gon' ask what kind of degree you got
To go to school for
Through my eyes I never knew
You would hate on me but now I'm through
But I got a plan
I bet a million you won't see me in the Hall again.

-D

From The Beat: Well, what we of course want to know is, what is that plan? With the skills you have, and the maturity you show in moving out from under your oppressive old lifestyle, you could be anything you want, do anything you want. And so what will it be? As for your old friend, sadly, it isn't about friends, 'cause friends wouldn't lead another friend into danger. And we have heard the story too many times about friends snitching one another out. We think you need to see this as a wake up call and move on from this lifestyle before it swallows you up!

RIP Glen Glen

Man, did these ninjas have to kill you? You were my best cousin ever. But you know I remember all the things we did together. But I wish you were still a live, because we always put in work.

-Glen's Friend

From The Beat: We're so sorry you lost your best friend! What can you do with your life to honor his short life?

Behind the Laughter?

Behind of the laughter.
Is it the sadness of the pain that you feel?
Is it the love you feel for someone,
Or is it just the hurt?

-Baby Lou

From The Beat: Or is it a little bit of both, a crazy storm of all the different emotions that we keep inside? Now that we know you have a poetic impulse, we're going to be after you to write poetry.

Everyday, Everyday, Everyday . . . ..

My name is Lil' Tommy and I was born in Oakland. For as long as I can remember we have done the same old stuff. Everyday is yesterday. I'm tried of coming to this hall, even though I said the same thing the day before yesterday. I went to court today and they said I got a couple more days left. Last week I said the same thing. I was talking to my roommate today and I said I can't wait until I get out. I said the same thing last week.

-Lil' Sunnyside

From The Beat: So we all know the saying same shhhh, different day. It gets old quick, huh? So now instead of waiting for other stuff to change, why don't you focus on you changing? A lot of the stuff that you are dealing with has been around for years and will continue to be there. The only thing you have power over is you. So tell us, what can you do to make better than today (in a positive way of course)?

A Lot Of Love

Yeah girl you know you my chick
Just the thought of us splittin' makes me sick.
Love you smile,
Love the way you dress,
Love the way you move yo hips.
You love the way that I tell you that you is my chick.
I love the way you braid yo hair.
Love the way you wear yo' clothes.
I love the way you my baby girl
I love the way it shows.
Love the way you wrote the poem to let
Every body know.

-Chris

From The Beat: Love is a beautiful thing. Do right by your woman, treat her with respect and take things slow. You have more time than you think so there's no need to rush.

Last Time To Shine

This is my last time to shine
Till it's my time again.
Through all the pain, hurt,
I still shine.
Though people hating and trying to put me down,
I will not fall.
Though people spit at my name,
I still shine.
When they put me in the dark
I still find my way home.
Shine is what they call me
'Cause they can't put me out.
I am a star
That is too far to touch.
I'm a man
That everbody want to get a hold of.
I am a star
That is waiting to get his true shine.

-J-Weather

From The Beat: We think one of the most important life skills any young person can have is faith. Like we always say, faith comes in many forms and doesn't have to be rooted in Christianity. The only faith we feel everyone must have is faith in his or herself. If we don't believe we can do something, there isn't much of a shot at it getting done. Continue believing you can do what you put your mind to. We expect you will look for above street level to see what you can really do.

Keep It Solid

It's been a year since I have been at this place. I thought I never was going to see this again but when you kick it with the wrong crowd you get caught up, even if it's for something you didn't even do.

All it takes is for you to kick it with one person and he'll say, "Come on lets do a robbery." Then you are going to be in the middle and thinking to yourself, "This ain't me. "

The only reason people rob one another is because people are from certain places and don't have the things other people have. Everybody wasn't born into the good life and there are some folks who have a mother that has a low income or don't have a dad to look up to.

Stay solid Beat Within.

-Man-Man

From The Beat: So many people leave the halls thinking they will never see this place again. But in order to turn those words into a reality some real life changes have to occur, changes that are hard to achieve and even harder to maintain, like hanging out with the right kind of people. Sometimes it feels like the cards are stacked against us and trouble just seems to find us no matter what we do. But if the same situations keep occurring, you have to take a step back and say what role do I have in this? What did I do or what didn't I do to let this happen? You sound like a smart young man so now it's time for you to keep it solid by doing better for yourself.

Love Story

With this letter I received from a young Chicano doing time,
I'm reminded of the beauty of bars
And how my soul squeezed through them
Like blue corn meal
Through a sifting screen
To mix with the heat and moisture of the day
In each leaf and sun ray
Offering myself to life
Like bread
He tell me he reads a lot of books
And wants my advice

-Unknown

From The Beat: Blue corn meal? Beauty of bars? What's your advice?

Why?

I saw my mother one time when I was six years old. I never talked to her. My dad never ever talked about her. I don't talk to any of my family and barely know them for that matter. I can honestly say that it doesn't bother me one bit and I don't know why.

-Dwayne

From The Beat: We know that even though your dad doesn't talk to the family much, he encourages you to get to know them better. We are guessing he feels this way because he doesn't want you to end up in the same position that he's in. The bottom line is that we can't make it in this life by ourselves. If your family means well, give them a chance. Give someone a call every once in a while just to say hi or go for a visit. At this point, it couldn't hurt right?

The Murder Rate

I want to talk about the murder rate. It's too high. I think it's like that because people don't got respect. Like us youngstas, we disrespect our elders, people's moms, grandmas and everything else. But we want people to respect us.

Some older people don't respect youngstas, so we argue and some people can't fight, and get whooped in front of they patna's. So they go get a gun and shot and kill each other, and it goes on. But some people kill people 'cause they owe them money and some people just be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Some people, it's just thei' time to go, that's what I think.

-Lil' Phats

From The Beat: Well, it's true that all of us will die one day. And you're right about the murder rate being way too high. It's really too bad. Tragic. There is not only a lack or respect towards others, but there's a lack of respect towards life. Everyone is so lost, worrying about only his or her own selfish needs, that we all lose sight of the big picture. What will the next generation learn from us? Things will only get better if we start with ourselves. Show others respect and you will get respect. That's the first step toward peace.

RIP Cell

What's good bra. Me? Shhh. My PO came to talk to me. He didn't tell me shhh I wanted to hear. Over hundred days strong me been in this hell and I'm ready to leave.

Still can't believe you gone, Cell. I mean I know it's true but I just don't want to believe. It wasn't time for you to go. I don't care what nobody say I'm about ready to get out and shine. Me and the squad 'cause bra you already know. We been going through some thangs and don't nobody understand us, man. We need to shine again but yea. Ronnie-B back up in here but that's somewhat cool 'cause I'd rather him be in here with us than him be out there without us.

Please keep watching over us bra. Love you bra dumbass. Rest in peace Marcellus.

-Naudie Bo

From The Beat: One of the hardest parts of losing someone is believing it. It's a long, painful process, and The Beat thanks you for sharing all your writings with us these months! Keep your pencil to the page, and we hope for the sake of your future, which is priceless, you leave your old ways behind and move in a positive direction.

RIP

What's up Beat this is Lil' Tuttie and this is for all my dead homies. You know I miss all of y'all and every time I think about y'all I cry because I miss y'all and y'all were always there for me and now they are gone so every time I write the Beat I always say RIP to my lost homies. Rest in peace to all of y'all, this is yo boy Lil' Tuttie.

-Lil' Tuttie

From The Beat: Thanks for using The Beat to honor your loved ones, but how about writing about your life, what you are going to do with your one life? What's your plan for staying safe, staying alive, and taking care of your friends' families? What do you dream about?

Behind The Laughter

Yeah when my cousin died me and my other cousins tried to think and talk about good times so we could laugh. Yes it did help for a minute.

-Xavier

From The Beat: Every minute of peace counts. Remembering all the good and funny stories about our passed loved ones is the best way to honor their lives.

RIP Emmit

Why did these ninja had to shoot you? The last time I saw you was when me and you was going to a party but forget all those that hate.

-Greer

From The Beat: Forget those haters, and don't get caught in their drama and end up sacrificing your precious life. You can remember your friend Emmit forever, but forget the haters.

Treasures

Have you ever taken someone for granted that someone else treasured? Yes I snatched up someone's girlfriend and they already dumped the person.

-Boyfriend

From The Beat: There's a lot of cheating and stealing in the area of love, isn't there? Why do you think we all do this? What can we do to take better care of each other?

Antonio

What it don't do, Beat. This ya boy Lil' Tonio up in the hall hella mad. I can't wait until I go to court so they can give me this weak group home release so I can go some dummy for my boy Cell and Marco.

Well this all that Lil' Tonio have on his mind. But I got to get this off my chest. RIP Cell and DaMarco. Gone but never forgotten.

-Lil Tonio

From The Beat: We respect your need to grieve and honor your friends who have lost their lives – but watch out for the traps that lie in going dumb! Be safe.

When I Go Home

What up Beat! This is Lil' Ant from the Hayward life writing once again. I have been in here for two weeks and have been to court twice. Both times they didn't tell me shhh. I go back on the 2nd of August. I am hoping they will tell me something but when I get out I am not coming back. I cannot live like this no more, people telling me when I can shhh, piss and sleep.

I have a son to take care of on the outs. I have to be there for him. I can't stand these people talking shhh behind walls. But when I get out and all who is reading this gets out keep yo head up high. And remember one thing: DON'T GET CAUGHT…

To all in max, CYA, and Camp, and in the pen. Keep yo heads up. This Lil' Ant. One love to all the fallen soldiers.

-Lil' Ant

From The Beat: If you think a life philosophy of "don't get caught" will prevent you from coming back to the hall, you are sadly mistaken because doing the same old shhh and just trying harder not to get caught is not gonna work. Get real. Everything catches up with you eventually. Be safe out there and make better choices, there's too much at stake, like your son! Why screw him in the end by a stupid choice on your part!

Not What I Seem

People misunderstood because they think because I'm small that I can't play basketball against people. Sometimes they think that because I'm small they could beat me in a fight.

-Turk

From The Beat: Small doesn't mean weak. Keep playing ball, and we hope the hoops bring you fame and fortune, not fights.

Homies

I want to say what's up to all incarcerated. Much love and respect from that homeboy.

-Pelukaz

From The Beat: Tell us more about why so many homeboys from your city are incarcerated. It doesn't seem right, does it? Tell us why it is – poverty, insecurity, police profiling, racism, poor choices on your friends part, what is it? Tell us what's wrong. Take a look at yourself!

So Hard

I don't understand why bad things happen to me.

I like to do good things for people I don't even know, and bad things start happening to me, like being in jail. Or why is it hard to believe, I try so hard to stay out of trouble, but wherever I go trouble follows.

I just want to get out of here and stay on the right path. But it is so hard.

-No Name

From The Beat: We believe you. We believe you with all our hearts. And we know you want more than trouble too. Do you have support out there – a group, a mentor, positive friend? These are hard times, and we all need help to rise above… Find your help!

RIP Cell

What it don't do Beat? This ya boy Tonio, the girls call me Onio.

Anyways bra, I remember the last time I was with you. We was in the hood and you was like, "Bra, we got to be cool because we starting to get too hot."

But yeah bra we all holding it down at the Hall and Camp and ROP. Sorry we missed the funeral Bra, we love you.

Well this all that I have to say. RIP Marcellus, we miss you we love you.

-Lil' Tonio

From The Beat: Street life is hot. It may take your life. Be careful. IN the name of Cell (RIP), make something out of your life.

Behind The Laugher

I tried to hide something and laughed at myself when I was with my friends, one boy, one girl and my girlfriend.

I was running from that girl and my other friend tried to trip her so she can stop chasing me, but he tripped both of us and I had to hide my embarrassment by laughing.

-Kelly Belly

From The Beat: That's pretty funny! Laughing was probably the perfect response. Ha!

Mousie's Girl

Damn, this be that young G, Lil Mousie from Livermore. Well, I just wanted to say I miss my girl Shelby also known as my baby princess. Every homie has his main female – feel me!

She's the nicest girl ever, she ain't never did me dirty. But I still stand tall on my feet you never know what could happen. I doubt anything bad would happen between me and my female, I ain't trippin'.

Well much love and respect to all. Alrato.

-Lil' Mousie

From The Beat: Mousie, be good/respectful to her and chances are she'll be good back to you. Stand tall next to her; don't let jealousy and paranoia ruin your relationship. Remember, if you show her respect, she'll show it back. Start by respecting yourself enough to stay out of places like juvenile.

Behind The Laughter

Some people laugh for different reasons. Some laugh over stupid stuff, like say if somebody fall and they know it hurt, they try to laugh to play it off 'cause they be embarrassed.

Some people laugh over stuff knowing they wanna cry so they laugh instead. Also, some people laugh just 'cause they see somebody else laughin' and don't even know what they laughin' at, so they laugh anyway. Some people laugh at stuff that be scandalous and they just laugh 'cause they be stupid and they just wanna laugh but they be laughin at the wrong stuff.

-Roland

From The Beat: Laughter is nature's remedy for everything. But, sometimes you gotta be careful what you laugh at; you may hurt someone's feelings. Always test with a smile, and then follow through with a great loud chuckle! HAHAHAHAHA!

Can't Hold Me Down

While the kid is back locked again, back behind doors but this time I didn't do it, but it's cool though cause I know I didn't and God do too.

They say I robbed some lady at Bayfair, but I didn't. It's hard sitting in jail with charges that somebody else did. I mean they got some money and I got locked up for that shhh. They can't hold me down forever. I'm-a be out in no time.

-Beam

From The Beat: Sometimes we are just in the wrong place at the wrong time. It doesn't help, that you've been back and forth to the Hall so many times. Even though you aren't guilty, of this crime, what do you think the judge will think? Isn't it time you get your life set in a new direction?

Making A Change

What it do Beat? This Lil' Garly From Oakland. I caught a robbery case and have been here for about a week and a day. The boy, me and my friend robbed spent two days in the hospital.

I regret what I did, but it is something I couldn't change. What I do know is, when I get out of jail I will still have a chance to make a change and that I will do.

-Lil' Garly

From The Beat: We appreciate the piece, but we are a bit bothered that you feel that you, if given a chance, could not change the circumstances of your case. A boy is in the hospital because of you and you can't come to your senses to say you could have changed what happened? So what kind of change are you planning on making? What was it that made you regret what you did? Was it your conscience or just because you got caught? Lil' Garly, if you don't give yourself a good reason to stop, then you won't. And if you don't stop, all you will be left with is regrets. This lifestyle can change! It's on you!

Laughing

Sometimes people laugh for many different reasons. One day I was on the bus, then I started laughing at a thought that I had in my head. Then this dude on the bus said, "Dude, what where you laughing at?"

Then I said, "Nothing." Then he told me, I'm sick because there was nothing for me to laugh at. But the whole time I knew what I was laughing at.

-Ghetta

From The Beat: Ha! That's pretty funny. Sometimes you have to be careful because someone might think that you are laughing at him or her. By the way, what was so funny?

Can't Go Dumb

I used to have dreads. Then I cut them all off. I feel like a new man. Wit' my dreads I can go dumb, but without them I can't shake shhh but my head. My head is cold. It feels better without them -- 'cause then I'm not a statistic.

-Mayonnaise

From The Beat: Anything you can do to help yourself get out of the rut you're in is a good thing! And no matter what, bald or braided, you'll never be a statistic to The Beat!

Just Laugh

people laugh at other people
to be cool or to fit in
like if someone would trip and all
it wouldn't be funny to that person
it would be embarrassing
so i just laugh at everyone
— plus myself

-John Doe Juggalo

From The Beat: Learning to laugh at/with yourself is a great accomplishment, so long as you don't start clowning yourself and putting yourself down. It's not the pain but the sudden loss of dignity, especially when too serious or self-conscious, that is funny — the momentary shattering of that so carefully maintained mask we all wear, just seems to strike the human funny bone. It exposes the whole world's game (which we mistakenly call reality) as absurd, for a moment, and we laugh.

When I Get Out

When I get out I'm goin to do right. Help moms and try to be cool with my dad and not come back, 'cause this shhh ain't cool. Listening to some one else, eatin' county food or takin a shhh with someone's permission.

Sometime I wish I was at home 'cause this shhh ain't fair, but I go through this shhh everyday. I'm gon' make it out, 'cause like they say, "You do the crime, then do the time."

-Not cool

From The Beat: Use your time wisely; it's all you have. Read a book, concentrate on school, do some push-ups. Don't let this time bring you down, use it to uplift yourself and excel. As for this experience not being fair, well take a good look at yourself and make some real changes so that you do not fall back into the system's traps!

Life Changes

What it do?
This Derrick,
man when I get out I'm gon' really change my life and be different.
I wanna go home and listen to my mom,
go to school,
get my work done and handle my home life problems
with a respectful tone and manner.
I'm out this thang.
much love.

-Derrick

From The Beat: Is it really that easy? What kind of obstacles do you think you'll face once you are out in the free world? Is this a decision that you can stick to? If you're really serious about change, make a commitment to yourself and follow through. You are strong, you can do it! Focus on school and your education.

The Beat Within

I don't have nothing really on my mind except
That I'm hella happy because I'm leaving next week!
I've been here since June 23 and it's about time I leave this place.
And I am not coming back to this place. I just want to say thanks to some of the counselors
Thank you for being there Ms. Chatfield, Ms. Witt, Mrs. Winn, Ms. Bernal, and the rest
That I didn't mention I still love you all! I wanna say wassup to Regina aka Suggas
Ill miss you and I will see you on the outs. Portia aka Y's Lady, you were always there when I was feeling sad thanks. And if you read this Ronnie aka Lil' Mousie, what's up! Keep your head up I will write you when I get out okay. Much love.
To everyone locked up just keep your head up!
Juan you ain't reading this, but I love you! And back to Livermore I go!

-Shorty B2

From The Beat: Just remember how agonizingly long you had to wait to get out. We hope you have had plenty of time to think about how fast you could get thrown back in. Now think about doing that wait all over again - and decide not to! Best to you and your life of freedom!

Think Before You Act

What I do ya'll? This ya' boy Fred. Man, I'm back in the Hall where I don't want to be. While I'm in here I've been doing some thinking and it was about things I can do to stop myself from coming to this place.

I think that if I can pick the right people to hang out with, some of this shhh wouldn't happen to me. But I guess that's a part of the game. This is one thing I can say to you people out there; keep your head up and do the right thing. If you can't do the right thing, at least try. Peace.

-Freddie

From The Beat: Freddie, that's good advice. How do people know what is the right thing to do? Maybe you could tell us in your next piece.

If You Ever Cheat On Me, Ill Beat Your Ass! True Love . . .

What's up Beat.... This yo' girl Deja. I don't know what to write about so I'm gonna just spit what's on my mind. There's this boy named M and he means a lot to me. I haven't seen him in about a month. We both got arrested, so he in the hall too. When I first met him, I was over my best friend's half-brother's house and he was there. He was kinda mean and shy. But the more I forced a conversation the more shhh he talked. So I started talkin shhh too. Then it turned into 'flirtn'

He live down the street from me so it was easy for me to see him. So I started hinting to him that I wanted to be with him, but being him he wasn't sure yet. One day out of the blue he just said. "if you ever cheat on me I'll beat your ass!!! And later on that day we got arrested! So if you reading this I want you to know even though I got arrested that was still the best day of my life... And I miss you a lot.

-M's Wifey

From The Beat: Have you ever heard the expression, if you love someone set them free. Somehow, If you ever cheat on me I'll beat your ass just doesn't fit into that paradigm. If you really think that was a romantic thing for your boyfriend to say, you have a long rocky road ahead of you.

Everything

Everything that I do
I do 'cause I'm CRAZY in love with you

Crazy
Love
Open ARMS
Everything

My Best friend in this world

I love you
To lose your love would be a damn shame,
My beginning and end, you're my closest, closest friend.

-Precious Love

From The Beat: Your lover should always be your best friend. Think about how best friends treat each other and then ask yourself if that's how your man treats you. If the answer is yes, then you got a good one. If it's no, then get out clean while you can!

Under the Influence

it was the night of friday
and all through the town
not a hooker was working
no knocks were around
the blunts were all rolled
and put into stacks
in hopes that we'd soon be
stuck and high to the max
when all of a sudden
there came a loud knock
and everyone yelled
it's the cop it's the cop
we went to the door
to see who was there
to see who it was
that gave us a scare
and what to our glossy red eyes
should appear
but a pound of mexican
and two cases of budweiser beer
the guy standing by
was wearing a smile
so we invited him in
to party a while
he spoke not a word
but started to roll
open a beer
and lit up a bowl
by two in the morning
all had gone well
the people were happy
and screwed up as hell
we heard that guy say
as he waved us good bye
marijuana to all
and to all a good high

-Tonga Yung Uso

From The Beat: While we don't endorse the use of any mind-altering substances, especially not those of which it is illegal to partake at any age (except for medical purposes with a doctor's prescription, and even that's only state law, not federal) — we must admit that this is an ingenious and entertaining little rhyme. But if you catch a dirty after your HV next week, you'll have no one to blame but yourself, 'cause there will be no guy standing by smiling with beneficence. You'll be restricted to Camp as if you had an incident. So laugh with a clear mind and a clean conscience, but don't go home at try this nonsense.

All Talk VS Actions

What's up Beat? This ya girl Kabanni writing my own topic. I feel if you ain't gone get off why you running yo' mouth? All day everyday I hear she say, she say about who doin' what, who they don't like, who's gonna escape, but don't nobody get off. I feel if you ain't gone back it up keep ya mouth shut. Ya understand me! I be sittin back laughin' at these girls when they be plotting on the next female, but when they see her they like she they bestfriend.

Man I keeps it solid, you ain't gone catch me speaking on the next female or male if they ain't present. Real females don't get down like that If you don't have nothing good to say keep ya mouth shout, and don't envy the next person because you don't got what they got,

Keep it solid.

-Kabanni

From The Beat: We hope you practice what you preach and don't talk about others behind their backs. It's certainly the right way to be.

Real Out Here

man shhh real out here and ninja fake
that why i stick to the code
get money and be wit' my young dunny
man i'm up here at camp
got two months left
i'm tryin' to get back to the hood
where i know i'm good
all my lil' females missin' a ninja
when i get out
i'm just gon' get it till i die

- Jerm

From The Beat: What you call real, is a life style that puts you in a near hallucinatory state of danger. Yeah, it can be exciting for those minutes or months the money is rolling in and you feel so good about your life of sin — but that comes to an end, when you get caught up for a crime and brought up on serious charges with serious time. Tomorrow comes. And it's no fun to go dumb in the pen', young friend. Find a legal way to get your pay. That's real.

Time At Camp

What's up, Beat? They finally came and got a ninja for Camp! It's cool up here sometimes, but it be hella boring. I got a couple of real ninjas up here that's all I mess with. You know, real ninjas. I can't wait until I get my home pass so I can see all my people on the outs. It's hella J-cats up here, you know.

To all in the Hall, y'all know who y'all is, keep your head up 'cause the judge and the DA want y'all head down, and be cool 'cause we got to get out one day — and when we do, everybody go' hate us 'cause all the real ninjas locked up or dead. All it is out there on the street is fake ninjas and snitches, but y'all know we got a couple of real ninjas out there keeping it solid. You know, we all we got!

-D-Bo

From The Beat: Don't you see the circular logic, when you claim only ninjas that are solid get locked up or dead? It's like you're volunteering for the grave, or waving your hand toward the judge and DA saying, "Sign me up to be a CDC neo-slave! Yeah, I want to spend my life in the pen', working for pennies to get out my cell now and again. 'Cause that's what they say real ninjas do! So to hell with my family, loved ones and freedom, I'm coo' with that. Being a real ninja on lockdown or dead is where it's at."

RIP

man beat i'm hella mad
this lil' bee
y'all know me
every time i go to jail
something bad happen
man i miss my ninja
ron ron and terrell
i always use' to
mess wit' rell on the licks
he had hell of them
and we grew up together
my ninja ron ron
was a bad ninja
we always use' to be on one
all over our turf
shootin' dice and livin' fast
all i gotta say is
r i p ron ron and rell

-Lil' Bee

From The Beat: You need to learn how to separate the love you feel that is eternal and real from the immature nostalgia for the thrill of living dangerous lives of crime, 'cause all the latter will get you is dead or doing time. Man, if their spirits could speak from heaven, they'd tell you it's better to change and stay livin'.

Clockin' Out

Beat, what up? This yo' boy, Young D. You know I'm clockin' out in the next couple of days! You feel me? So y'all stay up and keep doin' what you doin'. Ya feels me?

It's been coo' writing in The Beat. So y'all stay keepin' it real and do what y'all do. All the lil' ones out there, this is just a portion of your life — don't let this be your life, in and out of jail. Y'all stay up.

-Young D

From The Beat: Now stay free by changing what needs to be changed and keeping only what needs to stay the same. 'Cause you don't need anymore of the same old pain. So learn the necessary lesson and maintain. Peace in the land of the free.

Why

Why do I continue to do what I do and come back to juvenile hall?
I can't help that I'm a bad guy.
I always think the bad guy tries hard.
The bad guy looks better, so why do I think...

-Monroe

From The Beat: We wish you'd had time to finish your piece, because you're talking about some interesting issues. But for now, we just want to focus on one thing you said and tell you that just because you've maybe done a few bad things, YOU ARE NOT A BAD GUY. Ok? We'll keep repeating it. You aren't a bad person, and don't believe what anyone tells you. Your heart and soul are good, we are all born good. But circumstances push us to make bad choices. You can change your choices. Focus on the future, not the past.

Laughter Is Calming

There was this one time when I was mad and I was about to fight and my friend said something funny and I laughed and I calmed down a little bit.

-Kid

From The Beat: Yes, laughter really works. Smiles work too. Not fake, sarcastic smiles, but real joy smiles are as infectious as yawns!

Stubborn

man this lil' bee
shhh man i'm in camp
'cause i didn't listen
if i listened i would've been free
i didn't listen to moms
she told me to stop puttin' girls on the track
but i didn't listen
she said stop robbin' people
still i didn't listen
that's why i'm in here
i blame myself

-Lil' Bee

From The Beat: Listen up! Enough messin' up your young life. The consequences just get worse and worse from now on. We don't want to read you in TBWO writing from the pen' saying that you only blame yourself. We want you to be free. You listening to me?

Letting Time Fly

What's good to all locked up in this torcido and in the outs. As for this vato, I'm good, holding my ground, letting time fly. I'm here with a couple of homeboys, doing our thang, hitting them maquinas, getting down in handball. I'm just waiting for my next court day to come up and see what they talking about.

All is good over here, reminiscing about them old days, and welcoming the new ones! Well, I'm out; get back to what I was doing. For all who know me, keep your head up. And, as for this vato, I'm'a still keep holding it down. Alratos.

-Slick

From The Beat: Hold down your pride, courage and your sanity, as you go through this trying time. Chilling with a homie can help you pass the time, but when you get that good release — you need to know it's time to get a j-o-b, so you can stay out of trouble, have money, and stay free.

RIP Emmit

Bra you gone, but you ain't alone. I'm gon' to stunt my "RIP Emmit" hoodie 'till it's gone, bra. I remember we used to be at Eastmont on all the girls. The ones that didn't want to talk to us, we had many water balloons for 'em — and fo' the ones that wanted to fight, we got those girls up the hill.

Bra, I miss you bra! We used to go dumb on everyone, saying, "Over here, man!" Bra, I'm going to hold you down. I couldn't take it when you was gone, but you up there to tell me I'm not alone.

-Lil' Jay

From The Beat: You feel the love and the loss when you remember all the things you did together, good and bad. But you need to accentuate the good to stay free in the 'hood. Quit, go legit, and raise a family; maybe name a son, Emmit, in loving memory — but then raise him properly, for love of his namesake.

What It Do-Do?

hey hey you know who it be
your big uncle
you feel me
you know da one from fairfield
you know i'm just up here at camp
pimpin' this program
i would just like to give a shout out
to my homies on all sides of the bay
you know who you are
especially those in fairfield
i also would like to give a special shout out
to my lady michelle
i miss you and i'll see you soon
but anyways like i was saying
hopefully i'll be out of here soon
well your big crazy uncle is out this peace

-Fairlas

From The Beat: Wish there was something we could say that would get you to use this time instead of just pimping it — as we see it, pimping it means faking it till you're free, then going back to the way you used to be. Honestly, you're setting yourself up for slavery, in and out of jails and penitentiaries. What do you want to be? Crazy or free? It's your choice.

Dear Beat Within

This is Chop. If you are reading this, it means that I am now in a better place — home! LOL! But, anyway, I just wanted to ask if you would be so kind as to send me today's issue of The Beat Within as well as future issues. Thank you very much. Always, Chop.

-Chop

From The Beat: We'll send you the issues in which you appear which you have not yet received: 11.31 and 11.32 (this one). To keep getting issues though, you'll need to write us (pick a staff person's name to include with address, all of which is listed on page three of every issue, address and phone at bottom); or call us and ask to speak to Beat staff. Congrats on your release!

County

Saludos to all those locked up in the county or in these pintas. Well, this ya boy, Young Spooks, coming at y'all from AlaCo Juvie, just posted up, like a thirty-nine cent stamp, with the carnales, waiting to see what's gonna happen with me. But other than that I'm just chillin', eatin' this nasty county food — but hopefully not for long!

Other than that, I wanna say: All the fallen loved ones, may they rest in paradise.

-Spooks

From The Beat: Locked up is not place to be, but that goes for your future as well as the present. So when you do get that good release, change what you need to change in order to stay free.

Not Playing

sometimes people don't know when to stop playing
so that's when i take it upon myself to make them understand
might be fighting smashing or whatever i feel like
that makes them understand i'm not in a playing mood

-Anonymous

From The Beat: There have got to be better ways, 'cause resorting to violence will just get you played, especially in the sort of place you're in today. Try silently walking away.

Misunderstood

Allow me to introduce myself: This is Lil' Mark from Hayward. Now to the topic: I was misunderstood many times.

I was misunderstood by the system. They tried to put too much on paper about me that wasn't even true. Yeah, I'm a gangster, but they put too much on it, saying some off the hook stuff. But I wasn't tripping. Feel me? They could say all they want about this d-boy.

I'm'a say something before I step back and exit: forget the law!

I'm out. Alrato.

Lil' Mark

From The Beat: When you say "the law" here, do you mean the judicial system, including the judge, DA, PO's and even the police? Or do you mean the legal code itself? Either way, you've got to accept reality before you can change it; and all listed above is real. So what do you have the power to change, in order to avoid ending up in the same situation (locked up, facing serious charges)? Change what you do. Change how you think.

This Someone (Dedicated to You)

I like this girl, but I don't think she knows how I really feel. I really don't know what it is. I think she thinks I'm too young, or she wouldn't fit right with me, or I'm too much of a thug. She thinks that I cheat, probably, but I don't.

I'm ready to be with that someone in my life that's gonna do right by me. Look into my eyes and tell me what do you see? A guy who wants to be with you — and you want to be with me! Give it a chance, girl, and see how it works out. I will treat you like a women should be treated. I think we would make a good couple. So stop playin' hard to get and give us a chance.

-Lil' Jt

From The Beat: We don't know what to make of this piece except that it seems you are ready to make a change. There's nothing wrong with that, so long as you remember that despite all the romantic promises lovers make, you will never find love with no pain in the story.

My Life Style

This life I live is not cool, but at the same time it is cool. It's a way of living to get money and get power and respect and this is only on the street. But sometime things get rough, but I keep my head up.

I did not get a chance to say my name, my name is Jun Bug. People need to change, because little kids running around with guns and I don't like to see my kids doing the same stuff.

-Jun Bug

From The Beat: Can you change? You should set and example for your kids. The best way to change others is to start with you. Your kids look up to you. Be a good role model.

Laughter — Least Understood — Trash Is Treasure

ever since i got here, a lot of things make me laugh
especially when people get roasted by the staff
when someone throws something away and thinks it's trash
i'm'a go pick it up and turn it into some cash
in what way am i least understood
i'm not like other dread-heads and i don't grind in the hood
if a bop is trash then she's my treasure
put her on international and make my money for pleasure
ha-ha-ha, don't laugh, it ain't funny
'cause if it don't make sense den it don't make money
when i laugh, i don't care if it hurt you or not
i have a sense of humor and i ain't gon' stop

-D-lo

From The Beat: The exploitation of needy, vulnerable young women is an evil act, and evil brings evil for a fact! So if you want to make money, do it right, so you get to keep it where you want to be — outside, living free! Would you want someone putting your sister or mother or daughter on the track? Chew on that.

Another Man's Treasure

There was this one time I met dis girl, and she had a boyfriend. However, the relationship was not going right, and she really was feelin' dat ninja. Ya heard me? But I felt dat ninja was slippin' on his pimpin'. Ya heard me? So, you know, Young Chase had to step in and drop that bug in her ear to make her feel like somebody want her — and she fell for it, and I snatched her up, and it was all gravy! Ya heard?

-New Orleans Boy

From The Beat: This whole vocabulary of "pimping" is offensive, disrespectful to the female gender as a whole (and anyone who has a mother, sister or daughter, ya heard me). In a subtle way, it is as harmful to the young man as it is to the young woman, for he is depriving himself of an authentic relationship even as he strokes his own ego and gets what he thinks he wants. It's a sad degeneration of genuine romance into a dirty dance, a degrading exploitation of the human heart.

I Wish

I wish I could go home.
I wish I could see my girl.
I wish I could drive my car.
I wish I could call my mom.
I wish I could see my son.
I wish I could go to the club.
I wish I was out of jail.
I wish I could change my life.
I wish I could grow old and have a life.
I wish I could see my family.
I wish I could see my brush.
I wish I could open my door.
I wish I could see my sister.
I wish I could watch the news.

-Phil

From The Beat: Well this is quite the wish list. The good news is we are willing to bet that most, if not all, of these wishes will come true in time. We don't know your exact situation so forgive us if we are way off base but in days, months, maybe even years you will get your second chance. You will get to spend time with loved ones, you will get to go to the club, use your brush and catch the news. By in large the man who will be responsible for making these dreams come true, including getting old and having a life, is you. What are you going to do to make sure your wishes are fulfilled?

A Day Out

What's up, Beat? This Lil' Bee, you know me. I'm at Camp. I been here two months, and I finally got a home visit (HV). I went dumb! I went to the my turf and to another nearby. It was about crankin' hella females out! I pulled about three different females. That's all. I holla at!

-Lil' Bee

From The Beat: You make it sound like a hunter or fisherman. This is like a picture of you holding up three fish on a line. It must have felt good to be back in familiar territory though — home.

wasted your whole life on the block, don't you feel lame the governor can spend money on new jails or a new range

Questions

What is yo name?
What do you like to do?
Do you like to play games?
What kind?
Do you like nice things?
Do you go out a lot?
Do you have friends?
You like the way I keep eye contact?
You like my smile?
Have you ever seen a tongue this wide?
You like how I lick my lips?
Do you like my charm?
Has a ninja ever caressed yo' body wit' his tongue?
If not then close your eyes and let me be the one.

-Young Chase

From The Beat: It's not that sex is a bad thing, 'cause it isn't — but reducing your relations with the opposite gender to your practiced "pimping" (as in your other piece this week, signed New Orleans Boy), leaves us wincing. You're better than this, and so is she! You feel?

Sexy Treasures

What it do Beat? It's ya' boy Derrick from behind these walls. My boy had this bad lil twin right, I thought she was sexy you know. My dog was playin' her, so they broke up. I knew she was something, so I found my treasure ya didi boo boo.

-Derrick

From The Beat: What about your friend, how does he feel about the situation? Be careful, you got a good girl and you know what she does to guys who play her. Be good, peace.

Misunderstood

What's up, Beat? What's crackin'? This is Sasquatch, from Hayward. I want to say what's up to all I know and love. Now, down to business: Well, to start off, I'm least understood in the way I live.

My mom don't understand nothing I do. She wants me to be a good church boy, but that's not me. What I am is a cholo, a gangster, that's who I am. My mom is always on my case about me being what I be. I hate to be someone that I don't want to be, so I say, "Let me be me!"

I'm least understood in the way I dislike school. I hate going to school 'cause school's not for me. I never did good in school, so that's why I hated it. I hate to be misunderstood 'cause I just don't like it. So I'll say it again — let me be me! Well, Beat, I'm out till next time. Late.

-Sasquatch

From The Beat: You're a tough nut to crack. For one thing, when you explain yourself, your because clauses, just say "that's the way it is, the way I am" without explaining why. Well, you do say you hate school because you never did well, and that makes sense. But why do you have to be a gangster? Or, why can't you be a reformed gangster? You've got enough respect and self-confidence to show others that you can be yourself without volunteering to be a neo-slave behind walls or buried in an early grave and all. How can you expect your mother to understand why you would choose those two outcomes? There's a lot of room for compromise between "a good church boy" and a hardcore gangster. You feel? Become a warrior for peace; war is disease.

What I Did For Xmas

i went to my mom' house
the family and me played games
when i got there
then we ate dinner
we had turkey ham duck and greens
then i went to play
with my brother and sister
then i opened my gifts
i got a motor scooter
and some other things
the scooter was blue and white
then i got a new radio for my room
my mom said i had to leave it at her house
then my motor scooter goes real fast
then we went to my grandma' house
then she opened her gifts
and that was it

-Demetrus

From The Beat: It's good to have your words back in our pages. It's a memory that warms our hearts, Christmas morning opening gifts with our family. So, what happened to your motor scooter? Write us a story about you and it. We know you have plenty.

Fascinated By the Game

i'm fascinated by the game
loyal, never go against the grain
so many loved ones gone, i'm immune to the pain
they hurt me, so i'm'a do the same
i want you to fear my name
think ruthless gangster when you hear about wayne
the ones who make it use their brain
the streets will always be the same
it's the people that change
wasted your whole life on the block, don't you feel lame
the governor can spend money on new jails or a new range
but for new schools, he can't spare no change
now isn't that a shame
so why not ride or die, when everything else so strange
why be tamed
when your innocence was bein' permanently stained
that's why people want the fame
cars, drugs, money and sex, that's life in the fast lane
and that's how you become fascinated by the game

-Wayne

From The Beat: You have to add all these days and nights you've spent in max, if you're describing life in the fast lane. It's like you're describing a speeding train raising down a dead-end track, and you talk about the speed but ignore where it ends up at — mayhem and destruction. Without compunction you call that using your brain! Maybe one that's gone straight insane. Yes, you are a most intelligent individual with considerable talent, but learning how to live life well is your challenge. Immune to pain? More evidence of intelligence that's less than sane. Do you want to be one of those old guys in the pen' who's proud to claim he has no feelings whatsoever. It's no way to think, however clever. And innocence can be reclaimed, when day by day it is maintained — unless you've lost your brain, too fascinated by the game.

My Goals

1 Stay out trouble
2 Stay out of jail
3 Take care of business
4 Go to school
5 Get more money, more money
6 Take care of mom
7 Take care of sister

-My Goals

From The Beat: Some people might think it's not very important but setting clear goals and explicitly saying what they are is an excellent way to get on track. We all have goals and dreams but when we say exactly what they are it makes it even harder not to work towards them. So we hope this list is just the beginning.

When I Get Out

What's up Beat! When I get out of the hall I will be sent to camp, right up the hill.

-John

From The Beat: Keep writing to us from camp, John!

Secrets Behind The Smile

If only you can feel
The emotions I hide behind this smile
Then you know that I'm all the way real
And not some robot with no feelings
Holding all this in eventually it will explode and bubble over
It's really killing me
Without his love near I feel so sober
So if only you can see inside of me
And see how bad I'm hurting
And how my stomach is constantly churning
From all the pain I feel
And I hide all of this behind a smile
But that's only for a little while

-Y's Lady

From The Beat: It's true that institutions tend to treat people like robots or as if they're inhuman in some way. It's the nature of the beast. The best move for you if you want to stay human, is to stay away from the institutions!

I Feel:

I feel kinda down and I feel kinda low.
I feel so angry when I am locked up with no hope.
I feel my heart breakin' into pieces when I hurt,
'cause deep down inside me I know I can prove my goals.
I can't cry 'cause my body won't let me.
I deserve to be this way 'cause I let my friends bury me.
I am away from my family and that hurts even worse.
God can you help me 'cause my mom can't take no more.

-Nooney

From The Beat: God can help you, but first you gotta help yourself. If your mom can't take anymore, what are YOU going to do about it?

Gold

see some people
take some stuff for granted
like life
to some people
life is trash
to others it is gold

-John Doe Juggalo

From The Beat: If life is gold, why not live it so your freedom won't get stolen — 'cause a life of freedom is what's golden.

Check Up

What's up, Beat! This Lil' Marquitos comin' through solid and maintainin' my ground. To all in la torcida, stay up — be suited and booted everyday. To my family locked up around the Bay, I'm still reminiscing 'bout them days on the outs.

Well, as for me, I'm coo' up here at Camp Sweeney. 'Bouts to get my first HV (home visit) on the twelfth, and I'm finsta go see my moms and baby girl 'cause they missin' me a ton! Also gotta check up on my loved one's family, too. You know? I stay doin' that every chance I get, 'cause my brother been locked up for one year! I'm still keepin' him in my prayers at night before I go to sleep. That goes for all my fam'bam!

I keep myself busy, but when things come to mind, I let them take me as far as they float. So, for all my loved ones, stay true to yourself — and don't let them K-9's get into you, for that's their goal for the days to come. Be safe to all, and RIP to all the fallen — may their spirits guide us and protect us.

-Lil' Marquitos

From The Beat: When you listen in dreams and in prayer for the voices of the fallen martyrs to the game, make sure you hear the voice that comes from heaven, where they reside, forgiven, face to face with eternal love and mercy. But now that means, they know more than they did here on earth, and more than you do — so don't be surprised when their angels tell you to stop doing what you say you can't stop, 'cause their eternal spirit residing in God's heart speaks to you from love and not hate; therefore, they don't want to see you suffer the same sad fate of dying before your time or living out your life in chains simply because you refused to even think about change. If you hear a voice calling for revenge, then you know it's not from their spirits in heaven — it's just that same old devil that rules the street coming at you with the same old deceit; he's happy when you're proud to die for another one of his hateful lies, 'cause he loves to see your momma cry. RIP to all the fallen, speak truth to your loved ones and keep callin' back from that self-destructive track.

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY

About Me

My name is Sommer and I am in here for prostitution. I didn't really like prostituting, but I do what I have to do to live. I left my mother's home before I turned fifteen, and I started prostituting because my mother was a drug addict and I needed a way to take care of myself.
I had been working for about a year when I had got caught. And I had tried to lie to a police officer and it had worked. So they took me to 850 where (I don't know how) they found out who I was. But they did and they took me here. I hate it.

Since I've been here I have lost everything I loved except my family. I love doing my hair, my makeup the most. I love getting dressed and looking in the mirror and feeling beautiful. But now I am stuck in here looking at something I don't like.

-Sommer GU

From The Beat: We cannot judge your lifestyle because we don't know what choices we would make in your situation. But we can say that being locked up is one of the consequences of those choices, and it is one which you obviously hate. So we hope you can find other ways to live in freedom without having to sell yourself. There are programs in San Francisco specifically designed to help girls out of prostitution and into productive lives where you are safe and doing things for your future, like going to school or working. We hope you are able to find these programs. Ask your PO about them, or contact a social worker. You are worth more than what this ancient profession has provided you so far...

If I Was A Judge

If I was a judge and some kid caught a case, first thing I would ask is, "What were the causes of you doing what you did to get up in Juvenile Hall?" Then I would ask him has he ever been in Juvenile before. Then I would ask, "Have you ever been arrested before?"

Then I will let him know what his punishment is. If it's his first time then again, it depends on what you did. I'll tell him that he have to stay in Juvenile Hall for at least a week or two.

-Rodnika GU

From The Beat: Who else would you interview to find out about this young person? What other things would you take into consideration? If it was his first offense, would you want to give him more time to teach him a lesson, or give him less time and let him off easy? Is "giving time" the only punishment you can come up with, or can you think of other consequences that don't involve lock-up at all?

Where I See Myself In Five Years

I see myself on my way to da NFL in about five years because that's my goal. I will make this happen 'cause I see that myself has the ability to play sports and go far wit' my skills to make me and my family happy with the best stuff in life.

The schools that I would love to play for are Miami, North Carolina, Texas, Georgia, Washington State, and mostly every school out of Cali.

-Jamar B5

From The Beat: It's nice to see you're aiming for the stars. We have faith in you, but we also realize that getting into the NFL is extremely competitive — and can't be accomplished without getting your education first. Are you prepared to put in the hard work necessary to finish school in order to achieve your dreams?

I Am Happy

I am happy because I've been in here for about five months and on the third is my disposition and they will determine where I will go. My lawyer said I should be gone two weeks after my court date, or I can leave before the two weeks and I will be getting a new probation officer for out-of-home placement.

At first they wanted me to go to Denver, Colorado, but now they saying they want me close to my mom. When I do go to a group home, I will do what I got to do and go home and be on the right page running. I can't afford it and that's why I am happy 'cause I am leaving Youth Guidance Center soon!

-Ebony GU

From The Beat: We wish you the best wherever you go, but we hope that you can turn this short-term happiness into a long-term change of lifestyle. There is a lot at stake here, and you know what you have to do.

Stick Wit' The Real

Man, when you see a fake ninja you know because the vibe. It's just they just don't act real and they're not what you used to being around. That's why I stick wit' the real and dis the fake.

-Mark B5

From The Beat: Have you ever thought someone was real and they turned out to be fake? Have you ever thought someone was fake and they turned out to be real?

Understand Me

People don't understand me 'cause I'm from the 'hood. They don't understand me 'cause of how I look. But they really don't know me 'cause if they did they would understand me better.

-Hot Rod B2

From The Beat: What can you tell us that will help us understand you better?

I Can't Wait To Get Out

I can't wait to get out of YGC because I hate it here. I hate everything about YGC. I just want to leave 'cause this is not the place for me and I miss home. I miss my boyfriend. I miss being free, clothes, the good, smile, people.

I'm not going to miss court any more. To make sure I don't come back I will make better choices, listening to my parents and following my rules of my probation and go to school.

-Not Signed GU

From The Beat: Why would you miss a court date to begin with? What were you thinking? (Or, were you thinking at all?) We hope that you hate this place enough to do what you know you must do to stay out of it (and the even worse places they have down the line). It's easy to hate this place when you're here, and then forget your promises when you're out. We hope you'll remember your words.

Not Much To Say

I don't have anything to write about. That's something I don't do, it's not the code. "You feel me!" But damn, I guess I have to write about something.

I'll just tell why I'm in YGC. It's my first time. My name is Kendahl. I'm twelve. In here because they think I had a part in a robbery.

-Kendahl GU

From The Beat: We had to cut the end of your piece, Kendahl, because what you wrote is not appropriate for The Beat. But we want to tell you that you are twelve years old, and that you'd better start looking seriously at the consequences of your actions and who you associate with. You are thinking like a child (which is understandable — you are twelve years old!), but the system has places even for children. So we hope it doesn't take more experiences like this to make you understand it's time for you to think for yourself, and not follow others.

Crazy Love

I love you, Baby Girl, for the shhh we had
An' now am thinking about the past that we had
Damn, Babe, without you in my life is crazy
I try to stop thinking about it daily
But, Babe...
What? Don't even call me Babe
Don't even call me names
'Cause without you my life is already in pain

You told me one day that, "I'll love you forever
An' never play you whatsoever"
But then you said or your mind or your heart
But when I got locked up, all of it fell apart
But then it took you two weeks to play me
Then you said, "I'm sorry. Without you myself is crazy"

But then you guilty, 'cause you ran to another ninja
across the street
When he was two ninjas deep
But it's cool... don't ever come back to me
Go to the ninjas that were too deep
'Cause I already find my love that I need
But one more thing... I still love you, Babe
My love for you is still crazy
What you did was wrong
But I still love you, no matter what goes wrong

-Lil' Rider B1

From The Beat: We've all been there, Lil' Rider, and felt the pain of rejection by someone we loved (and it hurts especially bad if it's first love...). But in general, The Beat would prefer not to publish love poems (even poems as well written as this one) unless they speak to a broader meaning than just your own experience. So, next time you want to write a person poem like this to a real person, just put it down on paper, put it in an envelop, put a stamp on it and mail it to whoever you're writing to. Thanks.

Behind The Laughter

One time I had laughter trying to cover up something I did bad like me being here. I feel like going crazy but I just hold it in and smile. But now I feel better so now I know how to contain it because I'm in here and I'm not getting out until the judge says so. I don't mope around anymore. Also I know people who smile a lot but has a lot of anger in them, the kind of anger that can kill somebody.

-Dominic B2

From The Beat: We know what you mean about those people who hide their rage behind a smile. How did you learn to let go of your anger and feelings of going crazy?

A Day I Can Change

A day I wish I can change is when my uncle died. I had just left him. We had just got a 8th of grapes. Me and him had just got in my bucket and started to drive off. We went to the store and he told me to take him back to the jects. He said that he needed to make some more money because it was the night before Mother's Day.

He said I could keep the grapes and that he would call me to come pick him up when he was ready. He never called me.

It was 5:30 on the dot. I got a call that he had got shot. I grabbed my thang and went to the 'hood. It was the morning and I did not even wash my face. On my way to the 'hood I got the call that he was dead.

Since that day I have not been right. That showed me that you can get killed in a blink of an eye. Man I miss him man. RIP Nail Boom for life. I have not been right because he was my first uncle. I looked up to him. He gave me the money to buy my bucket. I love you. See you one day.

(To be continued...)

-Kevin B1

From The Beat: This is such a tragic story on so many different levels, Kevin. The first, of course, is that you lost someone so dear to you, and that loss can never be made up. The second is that he went back to make money for Mother's Day, and instead his mother lost her son! The third is your instant desire for revenge, which would have left another mother without a son and grieving. And then there is the lesson you learned about how fragile this precious, unique gift of life can be and how some consequences cannot be undone. We hope you give real thought to all these things, and that you are able to deal with the pain you surely must be feeling. We are so sorry.

Its Like A Jungle

Today I opened tha papers
Seen about four of ma ninjas
Two got hit wit' a kader
Two got hit wit' a 9
One in critical condition
Plus they found ma ninja mama on tha sho'
Wit' tha fishes
That's why I smoke a lot of boa on ma blunt
So many of ma ninjas that died
Sometimes I wonder
Sometimes it's like a jungle

-Lil' Purp B1

From The Beat: This endless litany of death every week brings us down, just as it must smash your heart to pieces. We wish it could end, but we know wishes are not the same as reality. But what we read in your response to these tragedies makes us worried for you and your future. Still, we almost had to cut this whole piece, Lil' Purp, because it was filled with references to revenge and threats (even against yourself), and that is just not Beat appropriate. We know the final piece is not what you wanted, but it's the only way we can keep it in The Beat. You have the talent to write what you think and still respect the limits The Beat imposes. Give it a try.

A Loner

One person? I'm one person my damn self. I stick to myself half of da time because that's just me Because when you with everybody else you could get in trouble an' something bad might happen to you. That's why a ninja like me stick to myself. Peace out.

-Jacori B1

From The Beat: Well, we have to ask, Jacori: were you alone when you did whatever it was that got you here? If so, then it's obviously not enough just to do your thing by yourself. Maybe it's time to rethink what you're doing, whether alone or not.

Out Tomorrow?

Dis dat young Payaso writing to y'all from this ol' raggedy-ass unit B2. Damn I was supposed to be out of here today, but the judge ova here playin' wit' my head. I'm in here stressin' like hell. I'm tired of dis shhh.

Oh well, I did the crime, I got do the time. Just keep my head up, you feel me. I been here for one month and three weeks, but I got court tomorrow. Hopefully I get the hell out of here, but you feel me, I'ma get out and just do good, just stay away from the block for a minute 'cause I ain't try'na get wrapped again and get sent to a grouper 'cause I'ma run.

But I'ma cut it right here and I hope I be out tomorrow.

-Payaso B2

From The Beat: We hope you're out by now, Payaso, and we hope even more to stick to your plan to stay off the block. Of course, we hope it lasts more than a minute, but if you can stay off for a minute, it'll be easier to stay off for two. Then three... you feel us?

Why

Why yo' boy hit? Had to come back
Why he had to get hit?
Why my boys had to go to the pen?
Why life is so hard?
Why the block get hit?
Why people on the block snitching?
Why them Feds had to hit so hard?
In the end, I don't know why.

-Chuck B1

From The Beat: You really don't know why, Chuck? Why you and your boys doing things that you can be snitched on about? Why?

This Stuff Is Not No Joke!

Damn, this shhh is not no joke. I could be with my cousin for his b-day. Then I just found out my other cousin is in here for a cannon. I'm hella mad. I could be out on the block gettin' money. I'm out on Thursday, hopefully.

-Junebug B1

From The Beat: As long as your mind is on gettin' money on the block, it won't be long before you're back in here wishing and hoping. Getting out on Thursday is the easy part. Staying out on Friday, now that's the part you're setting yourself up to fail.

Homies Gone

When my homies Weezy, Seany-Moe, and John-John got killed. I heard about it and I was devastated but I got over in time. Every time I'm on my block I think always 'bout them. RIP and neva forgotten.

-Lil' Seany-Mo B1

From The Beat: We're sorry about these deaths, as we're sorry about every death we read about in The Beat. When you think about them, do you think about what you need to do to keep their memory alive by keeping yourself alive?

Preaching

I think when government people preach to teenagers it's worthless because everyone knows right form wrong. It's just the decisions we make that cause us to be locked in the system. I'm pretty sure that almost most of the people that committed crime knew that it's a risk they're takin'. If they get away it's all cool for you. But if you get caught up then it sucks for you. If you think it's not a risk, you're taking when breaking the law you got some serious problems.

-Eric B1

From The Beat: We agree with part of what you say, Eric — the part that says teenagers know what's right and what's wrong. But they still don't really know how destructive the system is because juvenile hall is so minor compared to what lies ahead if they don't make some changes. The problem is, most of us must learn by our mistakes, and then the lessons can come too late. We bet that when you have a family of your own, you'll keep telling your children to be careful when they cross the street, even though they understand that lesson from the first time you tell them. Why do you think the first time tellin them wouldn't be the last time?

The Reason I laugh

The reason I laugh is because if I cry, mope, or show any sign of weakness, people will try to take advantage. So I laugh in they face and they would be confused.

-Jeff B2

From The Beat: Yes, we understand what you mean. But we wonder why people think that tears or sadness are signs of weakness. How could things that every human being in the entire world experiences be weak?

Behind The Laughter

I laugh when people ask me about the halls because I sometimes can't believe I got caught in the first place. And sometimes I'm kind of proud I went to the halls, but it ain't nothing to be proud of. I laugh sometimes 'cause it really is funny. I laugh sometimes so I can hide a feeling I have at the time. A laugh can mean a lot of things, but da one who's laughing is the only one who knows what it really mean! Ha ha

-Jay Dogg B2

From The Beat: The only thing we don't get about what you wrote is why you sometimes feel proud of being in the hall. What's that about?

In What Way Are You Least Understood?

Most don't understand... we do what we do for the money or fun.

-Young Pop-Up B4

From The Beat: Okay, thanks for sharing that with us, but how do you explain that after all the fun and money, you have nothing to show for it other than a public defender and district attorney who do what they do all for the money and fun they earn at your expense? Look around you... who's got the money? Who's having the fun?

One Person's Trash Is Another's Treasure

Things that people throw away might be my way to come and get on top of the game.

-Young Pop-Up B4

From The Beat: We'd rather you write more on just one topic than to give us one-sentence answers to every topic. Pick one and run with it. That's our response...

Lock Up

I'm locked up. Unbelievable. Taken showers wit' ya' patnas. Havin' to shut up when some stranger calls you. Wearin' yo' patnas or anybody's underwear and socks. I can only use the bathroom whenever I get a chance. Eatin' thin wit' no snacks. Lights out early.

In the street I'm always out late. Most of all about lock up I can't make money how I used to. When I leave here I gotta get back on my feet network wit' my patnas. And jailhouse stank. I need to be out eatin' and workin' on my CD. I'm out.

-Cuddie B4

From The Beat: Hopefully you've learned that your love for 'any kind' of money was what probably got the 'lights out early' in the first place. In what ways do you plan on getting money on the outs? Do you want to finish school? We envy your ambition while hoping you don't do anything to put your freedom back in jeopardy. Crying about the conditions of lock up won't change those conditions, so there's only one solution... which is to avoid lock up to begin with.

Letter

20 years from now I would want my kids and grand kids to open my capsule and find a Bible first because the Bible tells how all of us got here. Second, I would want them to see a picture of my mom because she was a wonderful person to me and other people. Third, I would want to roll a blunt in there. Why? Because a blunt to me ain't only a drug it something that helps you connect to your inner self. Last, I would put a picture of my little cousin Zion. He's three years old. Why? because I think everybody should get a chance to watch somebody start from the beginning.

-Cuba B2

From The Beat: The thing about a time capsule is that it's supposed to have things that show what your time was like. The Bible will be around 20 years from now whether you put it your capsule or not. That picture of your mom, not that's tight. If you put a blunt in, it would be to show them the life you led, and maybe it would lead them to their inner selves and maybe it wouldn't. (How has smoking led you to your inner self?) Would you want Zion to be there when you opened your time capsule? Do you think he'd be surprised at what he looked like when he was three — and do you think he would be surprised that he meant so much to you that you put his picture away for 20 years so that you and he could remember?

RIP To Bra OG

He was ma ninja, ma nerve, my dough, my hurt — ma main man OG. He was joy, ma partner. I was teacher, he was father. I still G school. We chilled, we moved, we thugged, we hung, we ate, we slept, we lived, we died.

I stayed, you left. Remember how we played to the left and we stayed outta trouble 'cause we stayed to our self.

-Hot Rod B2

From The Beat: This is truly a loving tribute to someone who was more than just your friend. We hope you find a way to stay out of trouble like before so that you can always keep the memory of your partner alive.

I Like Myself

I like myself so the other will
When they look at me they don't get ill
My hair is neat my clothes is clean
I smell real fresh like Irish Spring
I act real nice I dress real cool
I always be on time to school
I come to school I like to learn
A good education is what I earn
I study real hard hour after hour
Because I know that knowledge is the power
Power, power, power
Do what the teachers say all the time
So you can learn yours like I learn my rhyme
I like myself too, better than you
Me gusta como soy (I like myself as I am)
My rhyme is now threw.

-D-Skirts B4

From The Beat: Being able to like yourself is a very good characteristic to have. And it sounds like you have plenty of reasons to like who you are. What would you tell someone who didn't like their self? How would you help them?

Trying To Understand Myself

My way I feel understood in the least way is like for my family. When me and my homies is like about to bust a lick, I think about my family. But in another way I'm thinking how to bust this next ninjas head open. I can't really explain it. I know it's not right but then it make me feel good.

Even though I was eating right, clothes on my back, but just really couldn't figure why I did it. But ain't nothing wrong with me. I used to go to church do all the good shhh, but since I'm back in this bs hole, I'm really changing the way I act. Appear, perform for my family, and for my self.

-Jonathan B2

From The Beat: Are you trying to get back to who you were when you used to go to church and do good? We also can't explain why it makes you feel good to assault anyone, but we think it's very much worth trying to understand, so we hope you don't just ignore this mystery. We also hope you think really carefully about just how much your family means to you, and just what you owe them for all their sacrifices for you...

Enano

This is Young Enano coming out of B4. I been here three to four weeks. They're trying to send me out of state to do 18 months. I must've been laughing in my mind because if I can't even do a year, what makes them think I'm 'bout to do 18 months? But I'm 'bout to try to go to the ranch, and go do my time there because I ain't going out of state just to do some weak ass time.

-Enano B4

From The Beat: Maybe it would be nice to just knock the time out and be done with it. We feel like the faster you not only knock it out, but think about changing some of your old habits, the easier your life will be later on. The problem with allowing the system to take control of you is that your wishes don't really count for much. If the judge orders you to an out-of-state program, that's where you'll end up. So we hope you're thinking like an adult, which is to recognize what you can't change and do what you must to deal with it. What do you think you'll need to work on before you get out of there?

I Remember

I remember when I was a boy and my mom was givin' me shoes that they don't even sell in Payless. I said, "Mom, the shoes are ugly!" She would look sad, but that was the only shoes I can wear. My other shoes were all beat up.

I see now that some kids in other countries don't have shoes.

-Jeffrey B2

From The Beat: You're beginning to see the world through the eyes of a young man and not a young child. The child only knows his world and himself, but the man knows that he fits into a much bigger picture. Your mom was doing her best, now you do yours.

Trash Or Treasure

I've taken a lot of things for granted that a lot of other people treasured. For instance I've taken my mom and my grandmother for granted and my two younger brothers and my cousin. I cherish both of them. Even though that my cousin isn't my mother's son, she will do anything for him 'cause he loves being around her so much.

It seemed like I liked being on them streets so much even though I was going to school and still loved both my mom and my grandma. It was just the fact I took their love for granted, which I regretted since the first time I came to YGC.

I also regret losing this one female that loved me, and I just stopped messing with her 'cause she went to my patna house with her little friend and my patna gave her a hicky. But it just the fact she let him make that mark. But it's cool though 'cause she still in love with cha boy.

-Mike B2

From The Beat: Has being in here made you think about giving more respect to the real treasures in your life, your mother and grandmother? We hope so, because it's easy to remember what's valuable when you're locked up, and just as easy to forget when you walk out of here. So cut this piece out and tape it to your bedroom mirror so you won't forget.

Why I Laugh

Yeah, sometimes people wonder why I be laughin', what so funny? But I be thinking like, if they was in my mind, they be laughing too. But I rather think of something good then something bad 'cause the bad keep you down.

-Cuba B2

From The Beat: So what are some of those good thoughts that keep you from being down?

Let Me Out

I want out! I am tired of this shhh wearing the same underwear that somebody had on yesterday. Ninjas in here be calling theyself going hard, gang hard. Ninjas please, calm your ass down. Everybody is trying to get out, so be cool.

-DG B4

From The Beat: Of course you want out. Everybody does. And you'll get out. But the question is, will you make the changes you need to make in order to stay out? If not, then maybe you don't want out badly enough yet.

I'm What Way Are You Least Understood?

I am understood by the decisions that I make. I really don't understand why I do the things I do. I guess I do wrong things because I like the excitement of illegal things. Or it could be because I'm trying to get attention from grown people, or even my own parents. I think they are trying to stop me from committing crimes because I could get hurt or end up in a place worse than this.

-Lil' G B1

From The Beat: Sometimes it's hard for all of us to understand why we do what we do. But you have given us (and yourself) some things to think about. Sometimes, if doing negative things is the only way we can get attention from the people that matter in our lives (like our parents), it seems better than getting no attention at all. But think of the next step in your life (and realize that your parents are thinking of just that...)

Losing Respect Through Drugs

I used to use drugs and be trippin' seriously paranoid. And now I laugh at it. but it was not funny when I was paranoid

Nobody knows why I don't respect my dad, but after you smoke dope with your dad you lose respect.

-Ace B4

From The Beat: Would you ever smoke dope with your child after losing respect for your father? Have you stopped doing drugs and stopped being paranoid?

Eyes

Look into my eyes and tell me what you see
I see kindness, brightness and generosity
I see a future that only I can be
The colorful brownness, in my eyes to see
The light and the darkness all has been shown to me
Triumph, and defeat, this game is hard to beat
Though I will keep trying
Though I will keep fighting for the right to be free
Lying and denying, is all that comes to me
The love that's given to me is hard to understand
The feelings of trust, being in the best of hands
Is this true, is this true
I will never know how deep will my love sink
Down in the whitest of snows
Love is desire, and trust is belief
Love me, and believe me, I'm true,
Just look into my eyes, and tell me what you see.

-Cito B4

From The Beat: We see all that you see in your eyes, Cito, but we also see the baggage of the past that could weight you down, that could turn that brightness into pain. If that happens, you will be letting the most important person in the world down — yourself.

Treasure Or Trash

Call me a garbage lady, but I still got 'em — Pokemon cards, a movie ticket from hecka long ago, a bus ticket from the day me and my first hooked up... and way more. All the stuff is just meaningful to me.

-Crackhead GU

From The Beat: If they are treasures to you, then that's what matters. Do you think you'll still have those things twenty years from now?

Every Day

Every day
People die
Every day
Mothers cry
Every day
Another dolla
Every day
Poppin' collars
Every day
On tha block

-Lil Purp B1

From The Beat: Every day we have to choose — will I win or will I lose? Every day can make it harder — do I really want my life to barter? Every day some mother wonders — will I hear his voice, or cannons thunder? Every day another clue — slave or free, it's up to you!

Feeling It

Yeah, it ya' boy Art Cash, loved by some, hated by most, but its nothing. Feeling it. Yeah, I be feeling it. Just before I came back I was feeling it blowing big purp, getting loot, pounding shhh and scrapin'.

I was in Oakland with my big bras and lil' bras in the sideshow doing it. We started the sideshow off three cars deep. First it was us scrapin'. We stopped at the gas station then everybody stopped. Then that's when it was really crackin'. We bounced out with everybody else. We start going dumb, feeling it. After that we came back to San Francisco. I ain't gonna never forget that night.

-Art Cash B4

From The Beat: It does sound like you were feelin' yourself. We're glad you didn't get into any trouble that night. We aren't big fans of sideshows because we don't think it's very responsible to risk other's lives or safety. (It's not too responsible to risk your own, but to put others at risk sounds childish to us...) Have you ever been to a sideshow before that day? Have you ever seen the police shut a sideshow down? Be careful that your happiness doesn't buy you the kind of unhappiness you're experiencing right now...

Behind The Laughter

When I was younger, I was at school and back then in elementary I was a class clown. One day I got in trouble for playing and clowning around. I was laughing and the class was laughing and I got in trouble and kicked out for being disruptive.

I knew when I got home I would get whipped by my pops, but I was still laughing. But when I got home I got my butt whipped.

-Art Cash B4

From The Beat: This reminds us of a time when we were in high school biology class waiting our turn at the microscope with a cow's heart. Started beating out a rhythm on the heart 'til we heard the teacher say, "Most of us outgrow that in the 6th grade!" (We laughed anyway.) Sometimes we do foolish things we find funny that we know are going to get us in trouble, and when the trouble finally comes, that's usually when we start thinking about what was behind the laughter. Thank you for a good piece...

I'm Misunderstood

See, me and my cousins are first generation in America, and where I come from, the rest of my fams is so strict. You get beat wit' a bamboo stick.

Sex at an early age is crazy to 'em... sellin' drugs is an outrage to 'em... talkin' over the phone at twelve at night crazy to 'em... it seems like a generation gap... But it's all right to me 'cause they love me regardless... Yeah, I'm Asian!

-Crackhead GU

From The Beat: When we read the values the older generation of your culture value — self-respect, getting the proper sleep at your age, avoiding drugs and things that can harm you — it sounds like they know some things that maybe you don't yet appreciate. The culture you describe has been around for several thousand years. Don't you think they've learned a thing or two about how to live? Maybe it's time to listen to what they have to say, especially since you've tasted the results (here) of what ignoring their advice leads to...

What's Life

Life is something to look forward to, something like you can look back to or maybe something you love to have, and a life that you need and would like to have. Life to me is when I got everything I want. Brothers, sisters, momma, daddy, uncle, auntie, lose their lives from being in da streets.

-Rodinka GU

From The Beat: So what are your thoughts regarding your own life right now? The things you listed that you want are the most important things in the world — family. So, do you have everything you want?

The Things I Miss

The thing I miss the most is my freedom. The second thing is my family. The third thing is my girlfriend. The fourth thing is being able to have things when I want to. The fifth thing is not being able watch TV when I want to. The sixth thing is not being told when to go to sleep.

-Audie B5

From The Beat: What you are missing are the normal things of life that everyone should be able to enjoy. All of these things are within your grasp, if only can find a way to stay out of the system's embrace — which means, if only you can find another way of living your life. Otherwise, you'll find yourself missing these things, and much more, many more times.

What A Lie Can Get You

I know when some people laugh, in particular girls, is when you call yo' self spittin' game to her or make some joke that really ain't funny and she laughs — that's just to make you feel good.

Sometimes you keep going and you dig yo'self into a deeper hole and just makin' yo'self look stupid as the seconds and minutes goes by. I know 'cause it happened to me before, but I see where a lie can get you.

-Reese-C-Cup B5

From The Beat: What would you do in a situation where you were trying to game a girl up and she made you look stupid? Are you the type to get mad at a girl for not wanting to talk to you, or one that changes his own act?

One Person's Trash Is Another's Treasure

For example, my big cousin is doing it large right now. So he stay fitted and stay fresh because he got to because he is a baller. He got about 10 to 15 pair of white Air Force One's. So really he wear them once or twice, then he hop in a new pair.

So when he tells me that he 'bout to get a new pair, I tell him, "Bra you got hella pairs of Forces. Let yo' lil' bra hold a few." Really he could say yes or no but he has no choice but to let me get a few so I don't have to spend money and my kicks is looking the right way. But that a example of his trash is my treasure.

-Greg B4

From The Beat: Hand-me-downs are a good example of what we meant for this topic. What have you trashed that someone else has treasured? What do you do with your old Forces? Why would anyone need 10 to 15 pair of shoes of any kind? Well, maybe you could throw some in our direction.

In What Way Am I Understood

I'm understood in many different ways. How I tell people "Ughh, you look ugly today." Or I may say, "Why you got them shoes that don't even match? You need to go home," or, "You smell like fish. Go spray on some cologne. Even though it is working, baby girl, yo' odor is strong. So why you thinking you cute with your yellow and pink ? Go home take a shower and put on some baby power and holla in about in hour."

-Lil' Sexy GU

From The Beat: Are you telling us that you tell people just what you think, so people can understand you clearly? We hope you're not talking about anyone specific in here when you describe the things you say, because that would not be appropriate or respectful. Do you ever feel bad about saying things that hurt people's feelings, even if it is being honest? Has anyone said similar things to you that hurt your feelings?

One Person's Trash Is Another's Treasure

Something I cherish is my bra' shoes 'cause he got killed in them. Mom's got them in a glass case that says "Rest In Peace Marcus A. Law" in my room.

It was shady 'cause I was in here when that shhh happened. That shhh was hella crazy...

-Al Bundy B5

From The Beat: We had to cut this piece short because, although the first part of it was promising, we won't allow you to use us to threaten others. Never mind that we think those threats are stupid (in the sense that they only lead to more mothers and brothers crying, and more young men spending their lives in prison), the reaction only fuels a fire that burns everything, including he who lights it. We respect and feel for your loss, but we cannot respect or feel for the loss you want to inflict on another family.

A Smile

I don't use laugher to cover nothing up, but I might use a smile to cover something up. With me, I laugh at any and everything. I'm always laughing. And if you know me or if you ever see me, you'll see that I always got a smile on my face. I will smile if someone makes me happy or make me mad.

I am so for real, I refuse to ever let anybody outside of my family see me mad. It just won't happen. But I guess I'm always smiling and laughing because I am just goofy. And that's what I like to do. And I like people that make me laugh and smile. If you can make me smile or laugh, then you got a friend from me.

-Muck GU

From The Beat: We have wondered how you are able to stay smiling even while locked up. This piece helps us understand you and your beautiful smile a little better. Thank you!

She Been Down

Something I've treasured for a long time is my boo talking about being by my side. Yeah, she been there for ya' boy for the longest. And me I'm a real ninja that can have much more than what I have.

But real recognize real, and my boo is as real as they come... Other girls try to take her place, but they only get a dream and a boot out the spot.

Yup, I can finally say I love something besides that money and them guns, and to tell the truth ya' kind of like it. So to my boo Erica, you that lucky girl and you got your boy!

-J-Boom B5

From The Beat: If your love for Erica is more powerful than your love for the streets, the money, the violence, then it is truly powerful. We hope you don't give it away again by going back to foolish ways that can only risk the loss of everything. How did you meet this girl? We hope she'll be down for you for many more days to come — and that you'll be down for her in the only way that counts, by not giving the system any chance to take you from her.

A Story

Story was about a man that had spent over two years in prison, in darkness, in dirt, feces, urine and his own filth. He then became friends with a guard who later he learned that he was black. The guard gives him a pencil and he starts writing on it and then when the guard comes upon his last week there the man asks him to mail all this paper with writing on it to a woman. Later all this writing on paper becomes a book that is published.

-Rafael B5

From The Beat: Hey, we know this story all too well. You are telling the story of SunMan'sLight, whose book, "I Cried, You Didn't Listen," has just been published (for the second time). What kind of story could you write describing your own life?

Behind The Laugher

I laugh and joke around when I'm in the halls because this shhh really stress me out and make me mad. But just because I'm stressin' I don't need to let everybody know how I'm really feelin'. But sometimes I show it when I'm mad because you can't always pretend. Sometimes you got to let it show. But I feel like "laugh now, cry later."

-K B5

From The Beat: A lot of people use that saying, "Laugh now, cry later," but what does that mean to you? Can we flip it to say, "Cry now, smile later?" Do you think that would work? It probably makes more sense in your situation.

Behind The Laughter

We laugh at something that may not be funny but you laugh to get out anger in your life — just another way to express it.

-Young Pop-Up B4

From The Beat: Laughter can be used as a way to release anger or as a way to hold anger back from the light. When anger is hidden behind laugher, you have to find a way to put the fire behind the anger out. Then you can replace the cover-up laughter with a real smile.

Judge The Real Me

The way I be least understood is when people judge me for the way I look, talk, or dress. I don't like when people do that, like that saying, "You shouldn't judge a book by it's cover."

I don't think people should do that to me because if you don't know me, don't judge me. That's why I don't want the judge or DA to judge me for what it say on the paper and judge me for my real self.

-Dre Dojah B5

From The Beat: That's a really good point. How do you think a judge should go about handling your case? Should he talk to you first to see where your head's at? And then how should he react? And what about you? Who do you judge?

I Miss The Way We Were

I miss the way you used to make me smile
And the way you made my life worth while.
The way you used to smell
And the way you act like my daddy
'cause you know daddy wasn't there
I miss how we were partners in crime
But now you're gone and we both doin' the time
I love you and I miss you
This is for my big bra in the pen

-Young Show Biznes GU

From The Beat: It's beautiful to hear you talking about the love between you and your big bra, but it's also very sad to think of the two of you locked up in your cells. It's even sadder that you miss being partners in crime, because that partnership can only lead to where you are (and where he is) right now. So, what will the next chapter bring, and what's your plan for getting there from here?

Behind Da Laughter

Me? I'm weird. I laugh when there's pain, such as gruesome stuff...blood, needles, movies like that make me laugh... I also laugh when I'm nervous.

-CrakheadGU

From The Beat: No, you're not weird. It's natural to laugh when you are afraid or nervous. It's a very human reaction. Do you have any ideas why laughter is a natural reaction to these things?

My Treasure

The great treasure of mine is a doll that hang in my cell phone. Because that is my first gift to someone. I gave it to the friend on a special day. And I know that she likes it. She were trying to get one of it. Later on she gave it back to me because she like it because she think it look like... Maybe it don't mean anything to anyone.

-Simon B2

From The Beat: Of course it means something to someone, Simon. It means something to you! What or who did she think it looks like?

On My Way

Dear Beat, it's yo' boy Chuck. I'm in BI. I just got good news form my PO. I'm going to Philly to a group home for 6-9 months. My mom go come see me like once a month.

-Chuck B1

From The Beat: This really is good news, Chuck. The program in Pennsylvania is really a good one for anyone who is looking to learn and grow. So make the most of it!

The Way I Get Money

People don't understand me, like the way I get money. They say, "Why do you do what you do? You don't have to do that 'cause you got parents." And I be like, "No, I don't have my parents givin' me what I need."

They be like, "I don't understand why you do that," and I be like, "That's what I have to do," and they just don't understand me.

-Young Iysis GU

From The Beat: Count us among those that also don't understand the kind of "reasoning" that lets strangers take control of you, lock you in a cell, feed you, clothe you and tell you what to do. No, we don't understand at all. When you say your parents don't give you what you need, are you talking about the basics — food, a roof over your head, clothes to wear? Or, are you talking about things you WANT but don't really need? One definition of adulthood is knowing when you have to sacrifice your own wants for the sake of a better future (or for the sake of those you love and love you). We don't see the evidence of that maturity in the choices you say you have to make. Tell us where we're wrong.

What You Don't Know

What you don't know is I don't care
What you don't know is I have no fear
What you don't know is I went on a tear
What you don't know is one like me is rare
What you don't know is that I'm facin' hella years
It's real

-Henny

From The Beat: Tell us more about yourself, Henny. What don't you care about? What caused you or helped you become so fearless? We would like to get to know you better. We've already seen some of your poems that tantalize us to see who is this person who created them. Since you write that you're facin' hella years, how are you preparing yourself for the road ahead? Can your family help you? Now is the time to get yourself together.

Ha Ha Ha

Ha ha ha
I know this might seem funny
But I'm in love
Everybody thinks it's a joke, but I know it's real
He my boo, you already know
All you hatas need to quit hatin'
'Cause ya can't get my papi
I love ya, Boo

-Deanna

From The Beat: Next time why don't you send this cornball love poem to the person you love and leave The Beat out of it! Best of luck with you romance. Be smart, be safe!

Love Is Blind

Love is blind
And it'll take over your mind
And in that time
I will be heartbroken
Your love is like tooken
You left me
And you'll be back eventually
I just want you to know
That I love you
And I'll miss you, Boo!

-Chloe

From The Beat: There's no pain like heartbreak. What have you learned from it? Why do you believe this love will return? s it because the love you have for this person was stripped when you were incarcerated, and upon returning home hopefully everything will be ok?

Power Outage

The time I remember when I had no control was when I was on the outs and me and my moms got into a little conflict, so I wasn't tryna go home and I was just stayin' everywhere I can. I think if I would of just listened to my moms that day, instead of tryna be a hard head, I wouldn't be in the situation I'm in right now. So now, when my moms come visit me and asks me, "You wish you would've listened to me?" all I can say is, "Yeah, you right."

So to all you people…when yo' parents tell you they been there, done that, you should believe them. When all yo' friends is gone, yo' family go' always be there.

-Dumb Dude

From The Beat: You're lucky you have a mom who's there for you. You know the problem, you know who is there now go out and show mom and yourself that you can beat this and move on to bigger and better things! The time is now to change that name from Dumb Dude to Smart Dude!

When You Locked Up

When you locked up, you can't get no baaaby
When you locked up, you ain't gettin' no money
When you locked up, everybody seem funny
When you locked up, you on all the jailhouse females
When you locked up, all yo' ninjas going dummy
When you locked up, it's a life-or-death situation
That's why you do everything wit' no hesitation
Locked up

-Henny

From The Beat: When you locked up everything you once had is gone. Everything you took for granted is now something you long for. We do not understand how you being locked up becomes a life or death situation, or how you now do things without hesitation? Explain.

You Sprout And Grow

You start off as a seed in the soil of your mother. You sprout and you grow--no telling how you will grow. To be a good person, you always mess up somewhere in between the ages of the days of your life. Forrest Gump was right, "Life is like a box of chocolates—you never know what you will get." I'm a young teen facing many, many years—is the nastiest place you could get. I never thought about how in the family I will hear about how they care about me. It's hard to impress more than one person and show them what you can do and what you can't do.

Sittin' here, thinking…every night I will pray from the time I think about it until don't want to any more. It's people in this life that you will want to lean on, but they give up and get too weak and give up, so you get mad and want to do something bad to them, but you remember that it's not their fault…God is here with me and so is everybody else. My heart beats twenty-four hours a day to keep up and moving and to keep my mind to keep going. It's funny, ain't it?

-Forgot To Sign

From The Beat: You're right, we all start out as innocent little kids, and part of growing is realizing that the day is coming when we're all going to have to rely on ourselves for most of everything. That realization, when you're still young, can be truly scary and disillusioning, and as a child or a teen, we can either deny that inevitability and retreat behind others or face it and learn step by step how to take care of ourselves. So when others, including our families, let us down, we still have ourselves to rely on. When others are weak, can you be strong for yourself, and sometimes for them, too?

Love

I got feeling for a ninja
We met here
It was love at first sight
His accent makes me smile
I look at 'im and my heart starts beatin'
He looks at me and gets big ass smile on his face
And it makes me wanna smile
He thinks I'm a queen
Only he and I know
He my king

-Deanna

From The Beat: Again, keep the blatant love poems for you and your man. Next time write about something more serious, like getting your freedom back!

That Sandy Beach

The thing I dislike about the beach is how the sand can sometimes be dangerous because of the things in the sand, like the glass.

My favorite time to go is at noon.

My favorite beach story is when I first went there when I was three years old and it was the family reunion. It was so fun and I enjoyed it so much. I enjoy swimming at the beach. I also enjoy making sand castles with my sisters and brothers.

-Ranem

From The Beat: You can remember back to when you were three? Wow! Is this your earliest childhood memory? What is it about the beach at noon-time?

Tycoonin' It

I'm a tycoon ready to go dumb
Ninjas sittin' out there wit' round drums
I'm tycoonin' it, real shhh on my time
Marin City boys be hyphy, doin' the whole nine
We tycoonin' it

-Henny

From The Beat: What are you talking about?? Tycoonin'? Hello! Wake up! Whatever you were doing before your incarceration is now a thing of the past. So why don't you write us a real piece about your hood sickness or your desires for a better day.

This Is To My Angel

This is to my angel of my life. My life she got, but in my life an angel from the heaven above but her from God. She always been there for me in the thick and the thin. She is like an angel from God. She so beautiful thing I've ever seen. Her name is so beautiful as she is. That name is Dina De C. She is so special to me. I love her to death.

-Joker

From The Beat: She sounds so special and beautiful. We hope you love her to life, not death. What kinds of fun things do you do together? How is she managing without you now? We hope you'll be home soon so you can be together.

I Can't Judge You

My love, forgiveness, kindness is stored in my heart
I can't judge you for what you did
But I can't forgive what you did to my mom and me
The only one who can judge is God

-Lil' Foot

From The Beat: Yes in your heart you have plenty of feelings to share. And yes you can judge a person by one's actions, and if you do not agree with one's decisions/actions that's your choice too. Obviously this person hurt you and your mom, a pain so awful that we understand your desire to not forgive. We hope you do not ever, ever have to deal with such a person again.

How You Treated Him

You treated him wrong and it took him so long to realize how you treated him. So I took him from you and right then he knew he was meant fo' me and now he sees that his heart ain't broken. I want you to know I love you and I need you.

-Angelica

From The Beat: How is the young woman you wrote this to dealing with her former boyfriend being with you now? Are she and you cool? If he's a treasure, it's wonderful that he's happy with you, so is it as all good as it sounds?

The Fresh Air Up My Nose

My favorite thing to do at the beach was to go with some friends, climb on top of some cliff with a great view, and look over the beach and blow a blunt with some friends, get high. The beach becomes an incredible sight as the sun sets, the ocean waves splashing, the fresh air up my nose, clearing up my sinus. I'd sit back and just relax—no worries, just soak up the beautiful nature. Then we'd get a fire going and eat and relax by the beach. I can't wait 'til I'm out of all this mess, so that I can do it again.

-The Rollin' Stoner

From The Beat: Sounds so good, Rollin' Stoner. Do you grill hot dogs, marshmallows? Tell stories? Jokes? Wade in the water? Whatever was worth doing that took all this beauty and fun away from you? If you were free tonight, what would you do differently from the decision you made that brought you into juvy?

The Only One! God

Once I did not believe in the men of men. His name is God the Lord. But now I do. The Lord gives and takes, like if you live or if you die. God is the one that loves you unconditionally. Love forever and ever. God is the one that keeps you strong and makes you weak. The Lord is the one. Before I did bad; now I do good for life. I see now that God is the one that wants you to do good and to be true to one and he will show you the way to heaven and the life of good and eternal life and no more pain in this life or pain no more. God is the One, the Lord.

-Anthony

From The Beat: It's wonderful that God sustains, loves and protects you, Anthony. Do you think the Lord loves and protects everybody? Keep up the good!

You'll Get Through It Soon

I get out next week. But what I want to say, is, "You'll get through all of it soon. Even though mamas are stressin', a lot of bad things happen—from court, to family, or things going on in here. All of it happens for reasons. But the worst thing to do is let your head down. Like Pac said, 'You gotta keep yo' head up.'"

-Y

From The Beat: That's true, Y. But some in juvy are in big trouble and it's more than bad things happening for them. But your advice is still good—"You gotta keep yo' head up." You, too!

The Beach

Me and my boys go to the beach as much as possible. We go to Ocean Beach at the end of the Sunset District (my old neighborhood.) It's the only beach around here that allows beach fires and we stayed there from 9:00 pm to 5:30 am. We burned a whole forest and we were just chillin' with the beezies. That must have been the finest night of my life. There was about fifteen of us. I snuck into my house and got caught and was on parental lock down for weeks.

-Davin

From The Beat: The best thing to do, the next time you plan on a late night out is to call your parents and let them know you are OK. They might not agree with what you are doing, but at least they kinda-sorta know you are OK and are taking a bit of responsibility by checking in. Now that you most likely will be on probation, we hope you do everything in your power to succeed! Best to you! Remember communication it key!

Fake Ass Smiles To Hide The Pain

You see people around that come with them fake ass smiles, especially girls. You see some girls smiling to hide the pain they really feel inside, but ninjas do it, too...quick to laugh before they frown. But if you do the same thing, then it will be easy to notice a person who does that.

-Dumb Dude

From The Beat: Can you understand and have a good heart for someone who is hurting badly but doesn't want anyone, including you, to know how much, so she (or he) hides it behind a smile or laughter? Just let her deal with her sorrow, anger, whatever, and respond to her as she presents herself, even if you know she's fronting? If you were trying to hide your pain, how would you want others to treat you?

They're Never Gonna Change Me

Damn, I'm back again in an easy ass juvenile hall. This place is rank. They're sending me away to a placement. It's all good, though, but I don't and never will come to understand the "system." It's a bunch of bullshhh. They're never gonna change me.

-Dojaest

From The Beat: It's not the system you need to understand, the system is going to do what they think is best for those who fall prey, it's you that needs to be checked from the neck up! Get up and out of the system! Recognize your faults and move on! Stop being so damn stubborn.

The Creature Within

As I travel around to find the creature within
Different religions
I listen to my heart
To find out where I start the end
To spread my wings to find the wind
To soar into the world once again

-Tommy

From The Beat: What creatures are you talking about? What inspired this piece?

WALDEN HOUSE PSK

Why I'm Stressing In Walden House . . .

The reason why I'm stressing in Walden House is because I'm in here for like 90 days. My PO came and saw me, and told me that he would like me to leave a little sooner than I thought. I don't think I'm ready to go home yet.

I do have a baby that I'm going to have to take care of instead of my mom. I'm also stressing because my boyfriend went to the Ranch for six to eight months and I'm going to need his help. So that's my stress in Walden house.

-Jeannie M

From The Beat: We can understand why you're stressing, but your PO must think you're ready to leave. The fact that you worry that you're not ready is a sign of maturity. The things that you are worried about would cause any adult to worry, at any age, so as difficult as it may be, we have confidence in you. You can do it.

Momma

Momma, it's been two years since I been home. I miss you so much. I can't wait to go home because I miss the old times. Getting our nails and toes done together, going shopping, and just doing daughter and mother things. But in about five months I will be home with you again. I can't wait.

-Pooh Bear

From The Beat: We know your momma is as eager to have you home as you are to be there. And just think how much more being with your mom will mean to you now that you are thinking clearly and being sober!

Big Boy

He's the most compassionate loving man I know.
He'll never be a homeless Joe.
I love that man more than ever
He likes to chase me with a tether.
He walks with a majestic grace
He has a long cool slick face
We will never be apart
If he's tired, I'll push him in shopping cart
I melt beneath his long a waited kiss
We have to hurry home so he doesn't piss
I love that man through and through
He will always be my baby boo!
He likes to eat a lot of meat
He's beautiful, silky, and smooth
He's my man big boy (my dog literally)

-Lotta

From The Beat: Sounds to us like you are talking about a real dog, the kind that goes bow-wow. If so, we feel you! We love our dogs too.

Depressed

Q-vole Beat? Well, dis homegirl hasn't been up to nothing lately. I've been depressed lately 'cause my lil' sister (Baby D) is locked up in San Jo. I hate da word depressed, I hate being depressed. I'll do anything to remove the emotion "depression." Being depressed isn't a good feeling 'cause it drives me crazy!

I am also depressed 'cause I found out dat my man is cheating on me. But, I ain't trippin' 'cause I am here at Walden house PSK trying to get my life together — not for him, but for me. I am starting to realize dat I ain't gonna live forever and dat guys are dogs.

Well, dis homegirl is out, but just want to say thank you Beat for being here to help me express my feelings by writing to you.

-Smokey

From The Beat: Like we always say, Smokey, we appreciate the thanks, but we're the ones who should be thanking you because without writers like you, there wouldn't be a Beat. As for being depressed, there are many reasons to feel that terrible feeling (sometimes the reasons are chemical imbalances that can be corrected with meds, and sometimes they are related to situations in your life, and sometimes both). But one thing we know for sure is that just wishing it away or pushing it away is not a way to deal with it. Depression has a way of surfacing. So we hope what you're learning about yourself at Walden House will have the extra effect of letting you face some of the causes of your depression (and anger), and by facing them, cutting them down to size so that you control them, rather than the other way around. Keep learning and keep expressing yourself. We thank you.

I Hate You So Much

(Dedicated To My Father)
I hate you so much I stay up and think of ways you can die
I hate you so much I wanna see you in pain and watch you cry.
You make me feel weak, I'm tired of this shhh
I look at your face and wanna bust your lip
I look at old photos of us, my hatred for you is killing me inside
That's when I realize I'm giving up my power and wasting my time
You took my life, now I'm ready to take it back
'Cause it sucks being angry and it's happiness I lack,
I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired
Sorry to say but my hatred's expired
You've ruled my life for so long, but now I'm ready to forgive
I've been dead for so long, by doing this I can live.

-Maya C

From The Beat: You are so right, Maya. The hate you feel (even if it's entirely justified) can only destroy you, not your father. You are smart enough to see that by continuing to be connected to him emotionally — even by hate — you cannot start to live for yourself and to recover from what was obviously a very painful experience. Learn from it, but by all means, move past it. You will feel so much better. Don't be sorry that your "hatred's expired," be grateful.

In What Way Are You Least Understood?

Some people don't understand why I use so much. They don't understand how my use has been out of my control and that I'm an addict. They think all 'CAUSE they can use normally that everyone is like that, but they ain't. That is one way I've been misunderstood.

-Maya

From The Beat: Yes, many people misunderstand what addiction means, and think it's as simple as saying, "Well, I drink, and I'm not addicted to alcohol." Or, "I use, and I'm not addicted to ..." (fill in the blank). So what is most important is not how others misunderstand you, but how you understand yourself. And, from the sound of this piece, you are well on your way to understanding. Keep it up!

Mi Vida Se Complico Cuando Vine Aqui

Mi vida se complico cuando vine a este lugar. Cuando sali me dieron probación. Siempre que venía aqui, me regañaban. Cuando vine esta vez, no me dijeron nada.

Yo tenía problemas con la cocaina y alcol. Siempre fumaba mota. Pasaron los días y me la paso sentado en estas sillas de colores. Orale pues los guacho afuera.

From The Beat: Venir aqui siempre complica cualquier vida. Tienes un gran problema y te aconsejamos que sino puedes con tu adicción, que busques ayuda profesional. Hay muchos programas que te pueden ayudar a salir de las drogas y el alcohol. Hazlo ya antes que sea demaciado tarde.

My Life Got Complicated When I Came To This Place

My life got complicated when I came to this place. When I got out, they gave me probation. Every time I would come to this place, they would scowl me. When I came back this time, they didn't tell me anything.

I had problems with cocaine and alcohol. I always smoked weed. The days passed and I pass them sitting in these colored seats. All right then, I'll see y'all on the outs.

-Calixtro

From The Beat: Coming to this place always complicates any life. You have a big problem and we advice you that if you can't deal with your addiction on your own, seek professional help. There are many programs that can help you get out of drugs and alcohol. Do it now before it is too late.

Solo Me Dieron Un Año

¿Cuando senti que la vida no valía? La neta fue cuando me dijeron que me querían dar unos años y unos meses por lo que había hecho. Gracias a Dios solo me dieron un año y me senti muy feliz porque me quitaron dos años y unos meses. Dios es grande y por eso cuando salga me voy a portar bien, para ya no volver a la cárcel. No pienso volver nunca.

From The Beat: Se nota bien convensivas tus palabras. Esperamos que en verdad esta experiencia haya sido suficiente para darte cuenta que este lugar no te pertenece. Te dieron la oportunidad de hacer algo con el tiempo que te quitaron.

They Just Gave Me A Year

When have I felt like life was not worth living? The truth is it happened when they told me that they wanted to give me some years and some months for what I had done. Thanks to God, they just gave me one year and I felt very happy because they removed two years and some months from my sentence. God is big and that's why when I get out, I am going to behave myself so I won't have to come back to jail. I don't ever plan on coming back.

-Carlos

From The Beat: Your words sound very convincing. We truly hope that this experience has been enough to make you realize that this place does not pertain to you. They gave you an opportunity to do something with the time that they removed from your sentence.

Cuando Empece En Las Drogas

Todo se me complico cuando empece a fumar marijuana. Desde ahí empece a tomar alcohol, usar cocaína y hasta probe cristal. Luego empece a tener problemas con la probación. No he parado de tener problemas.

No heches a perder tu vida. Es todo, al rato.

From The Beat: Tú eres otro que necesitas ayuda professional en asunto a las drogas sino puedes hacerlo solo. Si quieres que tu vida sea diferente, tienes que dejar las drogas. Nunca, nunca, de ninguna manera podrías abanzar en la vida si sigues en drogas. La decisión y vida es tuya. Toma la correcta!

When I Started Being Involved With Drugs

Everything got complicated for me when I started smoking marijuana. Since then, I started drinking alcohol, using cocaine, and I even tried crystal. Then, I started having problems with my probation. I have not stopped having problems.

Don't let your life go to waste. That's all. I'll holla at y'all later.

-Erivan

From The Beat: You're another person that needs professional help with regards to drugs if you cannot quit on your own. If you want your life to be different, you have to leave the drugs alone. Never, never, in any way, shape, or form, will you be able to advance in life if you continue being involved with drugs. The decision and life is yours. Make the right one!

Mi Vida Se Complico Y Ni Cuenta Me Di

Mi vida se complico desde que hice malas decisiones lo cuales me costaron muy caro. Perdi a mis amigos y no fue por pelearme o algo asi. Ellos no saben donde estoy y no saben que paso conmigo. Ahora pienso que nunca los voy a volver a ver. Talvez los vuelva a ver dentro de un buen tiempo.

Mi vida dió muchas vueltas y todo cambio sin pensarlo, sin saber que al día siguiente ibas a estar dormiendo en una casa diferente y viviendo una vida totalmente diferente.

Verdaderamente tienes que vivir cada minuto de tu vida porque ya no volveran jamas. Sino lo haces, despues quedaras arrepentido.

From The Beat: Estamos seguro que algún día volveras a verlos otra vez. Este mundo es muy pequeño. Lo que tienes que estarte enfocando es en como no volver a caer a este lugar. Ya aprendistes, cada mal decisiones viene con consecuencias y ahoritas estas enfrentando las tuyas. ¿Cómo pensaras vivir el resto de vida que tienes? ¿Sera una feliz o una triste como en este lugar?

My Life Got Complicated And I Didn't Even Realize It

My life got complicated ever since I started to make bad decisions, the likes of which cost me dearly. I lost my friends and it wasn't for fighting or anything like that. They don't know where I am and they don't know what happened to me. Now I think that I will never seen them again. Maybe I'll see them again within a good period of time.

My life has been through many turns and everything changed without even thinking about it, without even knowing that the following day, you were going to be sleeping in a completely different home and living an entirely different life.

Truthfully, you have to live every minute of your life because you won't get those minutes back. If you don't do it, later on you'll regret not having done so.

-Cruz

From The Beat: We're positive that someday, you'll see them again. This world is very small. What you need to be focused on is on what you can do to ensure you don't come back to this place. You already learned: Every bad decision comes with consequences and now you are facing yours. How do you see yourself living out the rest of the life you have? Will it be a happy life or a sad one like the one you lead being in this place?

Casi Pierdo Mi Vida

Yo tuve un apagón. Fue cuando una vez unos enemigos me pegaron unos valasos. Ahí fue donde tuve el apagon y les aseguro que tuve la muerte por un ilito. Casi me muero pero siempre sigo en loqueras. Todas estas cosas me pasaron por andar robando carros y esterios. Ya me aburri homies, les escrito la otra semana.

El recuerdo que tengo de la playa fue con mi familia en Honduras. Fue para Semana Santas. Nos fuimos a la playa con mis amigos para buscar morras. Los guachos afuera.

From The Beat: Lo peor que le pueda pasar a alguién es estar apunto de perder tu vida. Esto fue lo que te paso a ti. Lo malo es que no aprendistes nada de esta experiencia. ¿Que es lo que estas esperando que te pase en tu vida para darte cuenta que si sigues caminando por los mismos camino vas a parar muy mal. ¿Que no fue suficiente lo que te pasó? Es tiempo que reacciones y te des cuenta que la vida no es un juego. Lo que has pasado y estas pasando es algo muy serio y lo deberías de tomar por lo que es.

I Almost Lost My Life

I had a power outage. It happened one time when some enemies hit me with a couple shots. That's when I my power outage and I assure y'all that I was very close to death. I almost died, but I continue doing crazy things. All of these things happened to me for robbing cars and stereos. I'm bored, homies. I'll write to y'all next week.

The memory that I have of the beach was with my family in Honduras. It was during Holy week. We went to the beach with some of my friends to go look for some females. I'll see y'all on the outs.

-Lil' Crusito

From The Beat: The worst thing that can happen to someone is to be at the brink of losing one's life. This is what happened to you. The bad thing is you didn't learn anything from this experience. What are you waiting for to happen in your life in order to realize that if you continue going down the same road, you're going to end up in a very bad shape. What happened to you wasn't enough to make you realize this? It is time for you to react and you realize that life is not a game. What you have been through and what you are going through is something very serious and you should take it for what it is worth.

I am going to behave myself so I won't have to come back to jail. I don't ever plan on coming back.

HIDDEN TREWTH

Thanks to Laura Rubin who directs the Hidden TREWTH, a very special and hard-hitting publication that features predominantly the writing of incarcerated youth in Providence Rhode Island, has so kindly sent us some top-notch pieces to feature in this fabulous edition of The beat Within. For your information, for several years now, we have been collaborating with each other. The Beat Within has shared numerous articles with the Hidden TREWTH and vice-a-versa. There isn't much more to say, except we appreciate the Hidden TREWTH tremendously. We admire their incredible commitment, and it is an extreme honor to feature the work from the following thoughtful writers.

A Bastard Child

The child grew up without a man in his life, his mother worked two jobs to support her and her son, and give him everything you could imagine.

He once asked his mother where his father is, but she never answered him.

So one day she came up with a math problem and it went like this, two plus one equals three minus one equals a bastard son. She explained it to him but 'till this day he still remains a bastard child.

-Rodney D.

Do Better

I sit up on my bunk then I ask myself
Why if I keep doing what I do will I have to die,
When I think about my family it just makes me cry
When I told my grandmother I give up, she said, "Just try"
She said I got to stop this negativity before I die.
I said everything I do, it just makes other cry.
She said I'm good in school but it's different outside,
I said I'ma stop doing bad and I'm get back on track
She said I need to stop smoking and stop selling
I said everything I lost I'ma get right back
She said I'll be much better if I don't follow no tracks
I said you told me many times I wasn't raised like that
She said look at your father now look where he's at
I said you are definitely right cause he will never be back
She said it's good to have you back look like you got a little fat
I said I'ma take a shower then I'ma hit the sack,
She said I'ma head to da store I'ma be right back
I said one more thing are there squirrels in da back
She said after I chased them out they never came back
I said nana I'm home for good I ain't ever going back
She said if you don't mean them words you should take them right back
I said them words you just said you should take them back
She said you know I'm just playing now go get some snacks.

-Dontez T.

When Was The Last Time

As I sit in my bed and I think can't
Remember when was the last time
I was out for the summer
I can't take it been here eight, two more to go don't think
I can make it. Every time
I get something the state take it
Try to hold a smile I can't fake it.
Every time I go to bed I hope I don't wake
And it drives me crazy
Sixteen years old and I already got a baby
And I hope and pray it don't grow up like its daddy
I'm locked up, messed up
All the girls I ever known are stuck up
So as I sit and I remember
When was the last time

-Ray G.

Face In The Mirror

I look into your eyes and see
No one was there for you.

Feeding your thoughts of a painful
World is becoming true.

No food, shoes, and water to drink
With no place to stay.

You hurt
You cry
You left
But survived

Fearful of what the
Backstabbing lies have depicted.

A life with nothing and no one
To give you anything.

You looking into the mirror
See what love won't bring

CHORUS:
Fainting Calling Crawling I see
The faces walking

Fighting, kicking, screaming, believing
The pain is talking
TO YOU!

-Keith L.

Jail

Outside of jail is freedom,
Inside of jail is hate,
I made too many mistakes, that was hard to escape,
So many chances that I didn't take,
Made me a juvenile delinquent in this state
Month after month, countin' every brick in the wall,
Time waits for no man,
Jail is a place
Where barbed wire fences and guards with guns
Keep you inside. Some people are doing life in
Jail and can't see outside.

-Rodney D.

Victory

Perfectly flawed, mindless mumblings of a ravishing beauty so startlingly incomprehensible, even the gods above couldn't decode them, a slave to her own will, but at the same time, free in ways others couldn't even begin to fathom.

She completes me, literally and metaphorically, bonding with my soul just by looking into my eyes. Never has a person had such a profound effect on my life until I met her. We were both weak, I more than her, and so I clung to her like an overboard sailor to a life raft. I relished the time we spent together, but it was never enough.

As my life was being torn apart at its seams, she was my only hope to retain my sanity. Then, in my darkest hours, I was separated from her in a haze of self-deprecation and regret. Torn from my side, she left a violent, bloody hole in my heart. A void which cannot be filled by any form of gratification. I feel I have lost a valuable and irreplaceable piece of the puzzle that constructs my being. Without her, my daily life is a hollow attempt at happiness.

-Mike G.

HIDDEN TREWTH (CONT.)

Da Key

People say, your outside life stops when
You get stuck in the can!
But in the RITS Café a painting says,
As the world turns... time waits for no man!
So, now since me and time are at war
I'm gonna get the key to life's door.
Whether it's a diploma or a GED
I'm gonna get it and do me!
Whether it's flying straight or back to the streets!
When I get out it doesn't matter
As long as I got that key!

-Anthony C

Bad Boy

I was a bad boy at the age of six
Runnin' away from home, smoking cigarettes
When my mother wasn't home, steal anything
I liked. I was a bad boy now I'm locked up
Doin' a bid until my eighteenth birthday.
I was a Bad Boy now I think before I do.
I was a Bad Boy now I wish I was home with my family
I was a Bad Boy now I'm doin' everything right
I was a Bad Boy now I can't sleep tonight

-Rodney D.

Cyanide Sadness

Verse 1:
Obscurity breeds purity
In my unfaithful mind
But futility and tranquility
Withstand the test of time
Sadness and animosity
Pound through my veins
Even though madness and ferocity
Bind my thoughts like chains

Chorus (2x):
I... I wonder why
Why I'm still here
I've... got no tears left to cry
Drowning in my fear

Verse 2:
Faithlessness and depression
Still fill the void
Left by the inner regressions
Of the problems I avoid
The disease is everlasting
Never broke the seal
I hope it's not the last thing
That I ever feel

Chorus (2x):
I... I wonder why
Why I'm still here
I've... got no tears left to cry
Drowning in my fear

-Mike G.

A Lovely Lady

There's a lovely lady,
That shines like crystals
But burns like alcohol,
Is as kind as Mother Teresa
But has anger problems like Mount St. Helens
Is more beautiful than the sunset over a snowy mountain
But has eyes like a one-way mirror
Lives a life so simple she has time to garden
But is more complex than college level English books
Is so smart that she could write her own encyclopedia
But is so street stupid she thinks all homeless people got fired
Is so close to me she could be another one of my organs
But is so different from me it's like I'm the criminal and she's the cop
There's a lovely lady,
And she's my mom.

-Josh M.

Forgive Me

I look into your eyes and see that I've caused you pain
If I could, I'd take it all back, including every single name
We both have shed tears
But I feel so heartless, you trusted only me with your fears
I apologize to you now very sincere
You are a strong person and can persevere
When I said I hated you, I lied.
I loved you like family in each other I thought we'd confide
It's strange 'cause after them 19-20 days had passed
I started acting like a fool
I thought it was all about me
But if I faced the reality
I shared some of the best times in my life with you
So I'm asking, will you forgive me soon?

-Missy

Untitled

My patience is wearing thin,
My head and thoughts are in a spin.
My nerves are shot. I wanna cry
I won't give them the satisfaction of seeing how weak I am inside. Spoiled girls, ignorant girls — which are worse?
I can't truly say that happens to be my dismay.
I wanna scream as loud as I can.
Beat people down like a beastly man.
Usually I'm so happy and full of fun.
Warm and bubbly like the heat from the sun.
I can't stomach the sight of certain people. Well, anyone at that. Especially when I keep getting called fat.
Sorry I eat and it shows.
For real tell me something I don't know.
I want to stomp, I want to fight.
It's all I think about as I lay down each night.
I know that fightin' is a crime
But it's almost worth that extra time.
Almost doesn't count in the real world.
My life is like hair that's curled.
You pull it so far but it bounces back sometimes outta control.
I need to control myself and not let people crawl under my skin
Like the irritating creepy crawleys they are.
If you let people provoke you, in life you won't get too far.
I am who I am I don't care if people like me.
Some day they will see the real me.
I am scared to see what I will do when I finally snap.
Give someone a punch, a kick, a stomp, and then slap!
I tell myself day in and day out to chill.
My time is almost up I will be out.
Hold it all in when you get out you can shout!

-Ashley Z.

HIDDEN TREWTH (CONT.)

Time's Lessons

Does time speak in rhythmic tones
Does time hear the deafening moans
The moans trapped frozen in time
The moans that just might be mine
Or is time deaf to its own defeat
Does time have ears to hear deceit
All I know is that my time is running out
And no one can hear me, even when I shout
Will you run a race against time
When you know you can't win
Will you lie to your judge
When he knows you're guilty as sin
Sometimes you can get away
Sometimes it works
But sometimes you get caught
And sometimes it hurts

-Rich L.

Total Madness

The clock keeps ticking...
Tick... tick... tick... tick...
And all the while my restless thoughts
Create a cycle of feeling
Feeling within myself that isn't there really it isn't there
Tick... tick... tick...
Was it ever there to begin with?
Have I ever felt before?
Or am I some emotionless entity?

I must know!
Tick...tick...
My sense of reality has become distorted
I lost my weak grasp on humanity
My life has become a constant state of delirium
What have you turned me into
Tick...
The clock stopped ticking
The hands on the face bleed time
Time that I no longer have
For the clock is no longer ticking

-Mike G.

Bush

Why are we in Iraq? You said we needed to help them get Saddam. Well he's gone. Now we're helping rebuild their country? Why? We're losing our people helping another country. They need to build their own country. Why keep getting our people killed?

So who's next on your list of "helping"? What about some of those poor African countries whose leaders are worse than Saddam? I know they don't have oil for us but they are really in need of help. Oh and why are you spending all this money on their war, if we have hungry, homeless people right here? Shouldn't you help our country then others? Or is that not what matters to you?

I have a feeling what matters is the money and the power. Well, I dunno what mistake you are going to make next but my vote next voting year will be for someone with very different morals than you.

Sincerely, A TRUE AMERICAN

-Josh M.

Mirror

If only I could look into your soul
I'd know what you truly need to become whole
Rarely is there a smile upon that usually well lit face
What happened to the joyful giggles and heart full of grace
I know the RITS has you isolated in a freezing cold cell
With nothing to think except how to escape this living hell
But there is no solution
So I'm left without a conclusion
Can the average female relate
Or just put this up for debate
Oh, how I wish the picture was clearer
Because ever since I came here
All I see is a blur when I look into the mirror!

-Missy

Sometimes

Sometimes I wish this stuff was over
Sometimes I wish everything I ever
Did would just roll over and go away
Sometimes I feel like a stray dog
That doesn't know its way home
Sometimes I feel like a hopeless
Cat lying dead in the road
Sometimes I feel lost and I can't
Find my way back
Sometimes I feel like all around me is black
I can't see a thing as I lie on my back
Sometimes I feel you can have so much and bam!
It could be gone just like that
Sometimes I feel like a crack addict smoking crack
Sometimes I feel like I try
To go forward but can't help to look back
Sometimes I feel dead
Just lying on my back,
Sometimes.

-Ray G.

Families

Yo' I hate being locked up,
Doing another bid here.
I can't wait to get out and be free
So I can be with my family.
I hope when I go to court that I can go home free
And be happy with my family.
See families are important to you and to me
Because without them you couldn't make it
Because when you do things
In front of your kids and tell them not to do the same thing
Then you're influencing them to do it
And then they are not going to listen to you and me
To tell them don't do drugs, how to eat, sleep, go to school,
Who to hang with
If you've already chosen their path to death for them,
See I'm just trying to help you succeed in life
And not end up just like me,
Go to jail not caring for the ones you love, drugging.
But just being yourself will let you see
That you'll be in the end
That loving, caring, responsible man when you grow up
And that will make you and me happy
That you learned that there is a better thing in life
Than money, girls, hustling, smoking, and drinking
And that is your education.

-Mike B.

Shower Of Shame

I've been locked up here
For almost 6 years strong
The best friends that I make now
Are already gone
I talk to the mirror
Wishing my problems away
But they never leave
Because they're here to stay

Every night I see heaven
Every day I see hell
Every time I wake up
I see I'm in jail
What am I thinking
What do I feel
For every second of my life
I think is taken away

What was I thinking
Where will I go
It's already over
And nobody knows
What I did was the wrong thing
And somehow I know
That my secrets will come out
Before anyone shows

Yes I did it wrong
Why can't I do it right
I wish I could get
Some sleep tonight
I want to
Fly over my river of pain
I need to fly over my river of pain
So I can get out of this
Shower of shame
So I can get out of this
Shower of shame

-Mike G.

Manifestoes

What gets under my skin is walking with everyone passing judgment. If they don't know me, why judge me? Is it because of who I'm with, the music I listen to, or what I've done in the past? It's sickening, seeing everyone judging everyone else.

Some people assume I'm a geek who sits and plays video games all day. What they don't know is that I don't even own a game system. It's not because I don't like them it's because my family don't got money for those things. Oh, but I'm white so I must have money. Yeah right! My family knows when the first and fifteenth of the month are. We wait for those checks just like of lot of other people out there. So when someone judges you, try to become like they picture you. You know, rich. So stealing makes more money than working 9 – 5, so instead of 9 – 5 I'ma steal.

But look now, trying to live up to those judgments got me locked up. I sure ain't making any money to help my family in here. Well not anywhere close to what even a 9 – 5 would be giving me. So, no more living up to those judgments. I'ma do me and if you think that I should be some rich boy playing video games all day then fine, but that ain't me and I ain't getting locked up no more to try and prove you right. I'ma work legit and make my money as it comes.

-Josh M.

HIDDEN TREWTH (CONT.)

Lost Soldiers

There's so many reasons for these tears, dare I say them out loud.
Sometime when I think about 'em, I wonder, "Am I even allowed?"
See, I been dying from this world since the day I was born.
From a disease called life, man my heart seems torn.
I think about the past and I did things that was no good.
That must explain why I wake up in the dead of the night
Dripping wit' cold sweat, seems like I put up a fight
I look in my daughter's eyes and forget all those feelings
I love her mother, my lady, with them there ain't nuttin' I'm fearin'
Chilled on da block, now I'm locked up, dudes thinking I'm dead
My lost soldiers don't ever think that you are forgotten
You put up wit' hard struggles 'cause of the trouble you got in
I know you all in a place that's meant for us thugs
Damn, ya' fam, they wouldn't never believe me.
So I'd talk to God cause he the only one that would hear me.
Asked him to send a message to all the true people I lost;
"I love you, rest in peace. I'ma do good at all costs."

-Jesus M.

Growin' Up

The young minds is ignorant sayin', "Go ahead and pull it."
I can't believe it. I look at these kids and they young.
Not even teenagers yet and they beefin' with guns.
Got young, scared, naïve girls getting impregnated.
Having abortions, not knowing that they gonna be hating
Their own souls
They grow colder the older they grow
'Cause they killed something so special that was part of them all along
And all those chumps playing those trifling games
How's it feel to have a child and it don't know your name?
You got yourself to blame
Who am I?
I'm crazy cause I'm bout ready to die
With no one by my side.
I spit that raw, lyrical crack, that'll push you back with a smack.
Whether you're Spanish, Asian, or Black
It's a fact
I'll have you thinking a lot about life.
Just listen to me, forget what you trying to do with that knife.
We all make mistakes
I understand you got to get your cake
But you don't know how many lives are at stake
And you got to escape,
But wait
Before you go to leave
Have some advice:
Try to take care of your itty-bitty seed
'Cause money hungry streets can manipulate the mind.
You don't have to sell drugs just to stay on your grind.
She one of a kind
So just put this in your mind.
(Say to yourself) I have to put her life before mine.
Hurry up, hurry up, make your pick real quick.
Before it's too late,
Before she go through the same damn shhh

-Jesus M.

My Labels

Why do people judge me by how I look
Don't they see that I'm not just a criminal or a crook
If only they lived my life, saw what I saw
Their mouths would drop open in awe
But just because I don't got to the spa every week
Doesn't mean I'm always on that midnight creep

-Missy L.

HIDDEN TREWTH (CONT.)

Red, White, And Brainwashed

Robotic responses of pure uniformity
Repressed urges to lash out against authority
Diluted standings of your personality,
Languishing in the wake of verbal brutality.

Salute your flag and take a hypocritical oath,
Promising you'll fight the battles of a President you loathe.
Shooting other people on a country's foreign soil,
Our lives are worth nothing in the constant war for oil.

-Mike G.

Ever Get Better

Sitting on a temporary cot in my state blues
I kick off these whack looking handicapped shoes
Girls are getting visits
And still yelling at they parents, what is this
We're locked up like Cassidy
And I hate asking staff if I can go to the bathroom and pee
We moved out of Rossi, now we're at Mathias
I hope these girls don't act a fool
I feel like I'm in the movie "White Chicks"
'Cause I'm 'bout to write a letter
Like, "Dear Mr. Superintendent, will things ever get better?"

-Missy

Concrete Thoughts

Look deep into my golden brown eyes
Is it me you see or just a disguise
On the outside I'm one of the nicest people you will ever meet
But on the inside my heart is like Ashanti's rose, concrete
I fear the way that people look at me
But do the same foolish things over again you see
I can't stop this
Most days I wake up and feel like shhh
But I force a smile on my face
And say I like how the state food tastes
I caught a 6-month bid
For some dumb stuff I did
Yet I'm slowly driving myself insane
Because I no longer can bare this pain
This burden on my chest fills me with fear
But honestly I won't shed a tear
I was taught that only weak people cry
So now I reside in the darkness of the devil's eye
But why
I just want to survive
But something's holding me back
Disabling me to get my life on track
Temptation is my devil and strength is my savior
I guess the main factor to success is labor
Realizing that I am now ready
I must help myself, I shall walk steady!

-Missy

Don't Understand Why

Deep, remarkable thoughts stun through
My mind when I'm meditating in my cell,
Like my demonstration or the discrimination
In the nation today,
And the lack of communication between kids and their elders,
That's why children are rejecting the selection
Of education, they rather have the choice of
Intoxication than graduation,
Many kids die over dime sacks,
But hear we are busting our back just to go back
The same lifestyle that got us in here,
But not me because I'll be something in life
Because I'm not like these kids
That think it's cool to carry guns and knives,
That's why in my personality
I see that you're mental mind is the real immortality,
But in reality we came to realize that life
Is too short not to know the truth
The truth about love, hate and envy,
We can love, hate, and envy one person,
But we don't understand why

-Ruben T.

Paths Of Life

In life there are many paths in which to choose
Some will bring you to your winnings and others will cause you to lose
Paths are the decisions you make in everyday life
Most will bring you into temptation and continue causing you strife
The paths remaining will help you reach new and greater places
Choose wisely for there have been some severe cases
For example take my life, constantly in and out of the RITS
Getting out and looking who wants to throw fists
Back then I thought that's what my life needs
I would take out all the pain of seeing my mom on drugs
On everyone who got close to me or that I ever loved
Yea, that was the wrong path
So now I'm in the process of something that I like to call "backtrack"
I'm going to college and want to get a real job
That was the easy way out of my situation
And my life is in the making like an artist's creation
Turning into the shape that my choices are molding
All this depends on whether I survive or end up folding
Pressure and temptation are going against me
My only option now is to prove myself worthy!

-Missy L.

State Of The Union

When the going gets tough
The weak get left behind
I wonder how these thoughts
Get inside my mind
A law of reality
Ignored by society
What else does the public not want to know
What else does this country not want to show
Deception is what they do
You'll never know what's true
They keep telling lies
Covered in half truths
It's like trying to move
When you're strapped in a papoose
It is like they've forgotten
What freedom really is
And the only thing they care about
Is their own show biz
Twisting words to make themselves right
Lying, conniving, making people want to fight
For what reason
For what cause
Maybe because they won't admit their flaws
Errors that go unnoticed, unsaid
Errors that take lives
While they're asleep in their bed
Gently shaken to consciousness
From dreams with beautiful views
100,000 people dies last night
It's going to be on the news.

-Rich L.

Give Peace A Chance

Progress, really, are we?
There's a million Al-Zarqawi's
America has no friends around
'Cause we sacrifice are own men to
Hunt men down
But I can't attack America
Cause its leaders views that are trashing everyone
But I also can't back America
Cause the commander and chief promotes
Mass hysteria
We can't wait till there's no more men to give
Or his approval rating is in the negative
Or when his term's up and he's exiting
This country he abused like prescription medicine.

-Dan M.

Hip-Hop Is Me

Hip-Hop what could it be
Maybe it's letting all my rhymes flow free
And painting a perfect picture so beautifully
Maybe it's the way the world turns
Or it could be the love we all yearn
Whatever it is Hip-Hop is cool
'Cause Hip-Hop is me

-Anthony L.

Don't Make Mom Cry

I got here I don't care
Daddy wish you were here
I dare swear I think you are still here
I have no fear I know you care
But you can't hear
I know that you can hear and see what I do
But you can't speak to me so what can I do
Because you are done I am all done getting into trouble
But I can see you when I go to bed because you are a soul.

When you were here you showed me love
Now you are an angel holding a white dove
All these other people show me love
You follow me in my body until the day I go
So here we go
You're clear like snow
You are rain that makes people insane
You're a white cloud in the sky
Waiting for other people to die
But don't make their family cry
Stay and pray stay high in the sky
See you when I die
Please don't make mom cry

-Josh B.

Hip-Hop

Hip-Hop never gives me words to speak
See him walkin' down my street
Through a pen and a pad and a beat
Comes when he's not except
Gives me signs but can't detect it
Sometimes I wish he be dead
Because all throughout the night can't forgive what he said
Tell him to leave me alone
Can't sleep 'cause he's all in my home
Whispering words in my dome
Come on Hip-Hop just leave me alone!

-Jerome M.

HIDDEN TREWTH (CONT.)

Just Another Problem

Pistol's pop, due to, pressure and pain!
Tho'...
...Why play with guns with no roof in the rain!
Street life's ugly, dirty, and rough!
Tho', the man doesn't care 'cause our struggle ain't enough!
He adds to the problems by drowning us with drugs...
Supplies us with guns to put man against man.
Not fully understanding what he's doin' to our race
Tho' it's all good 'cause it's just another problem we'll face!
Get out of jail with the question,
What's this thing you call beef?
Killing your brother from the same mother
'Cause he's walking on your street!
Now, your girl is gonna leave you with your seed in the oven!
You don't know your seed 'cause you hate the girl,
But you can really say you love 'em.
Now, you're in a dark alley staring down
The barrel of a 357 revolver!
Are you gonna die... who knows...
It's just another problem!

-Anthony C.

Focused Youngin'

Caged in like a beast.
Emotions, I feel the least.
With myself, I come to peace.
So, I'm waiting to decease.

Happy with my completed mission.
Angry with my current position.
I've learned to not talk but listen.
Though, with my past, I regret nothing...
For I live for today.
Not expecting to see tomorrow.
All my insides are hollow.
Yet, my heart still bleeds.

My life's at full speed
Not in gear to slow down.
While my feet is on the ground.
And I am level headed.

Tryin to get what I can with
What I got. So, I can do...

Everything and nothing
That I'm about to go through!

-Anthony C.

Rain

The wind-whipped rain stings at my face
And caresses my tortured soul

Recurring thoughts of ignored inner pain
Leave my mind wounded and weak
I'm tethered to my lifeless heart
Never finding the freedom I seek

Angel's hands can't reach inside
Where the darkness has caged me in
Never knowing why it is
That I'm living a life of sin.

-Mike G.

HIDDEN TREWTH (CONT.)

When My Soul Dies

Hear me speak
Hear my verse
Hear my sweet and shallow curse

Hear me yell
See me smell
This vile trifled earth

Hear my silence
As an answer
To my own forgotten birth

Hear my words
Help the weak
When I'm in shadow I don't speak

See the world
Fall and shatter
Into a stinking garbage heap

Feel the thunder
As it roars
Awakening a sinful slumber

See the lightening
Striking trees
Leaving waste up to my knees

Wonder where wonder how
Wonder if I'm sleeping now
Because I see so many souls
Falling through so many holes
Through the ground without a sound
How did they get so violent
How did they get so dim
When they were all like mine; Sun
And filled will love up to their brim.

This hateful world filled with lies
Takes each soul until it dies

But some are stronger than the weak
They will never accept defeat

The strong will help those that fall
But who will hear them when they call.

-Rich L.

Promise

That one-day a week
Which we break bread and meet
You asked, promise me
You won't go live across the street
Make more bad decisions
Not be conscious of bad living
Life is gladly given
And sadly stricken
Taken from you if you don't wanna listen
Sitting staring at barbed wire shadows that glisten
All these memories that you're missing
Cause you're selfish body is locked up in prison
Thought this easy way would take you higher
Can't run away from fences of razor wire
Thought you were a king, you're just a squire
Cell mates and bricks, inmates and liars
So I'll make this promise
A promise I'll keep
To be more than the state's garbage
To fight strong, not cop out weak

-Dan M.

One More

One more time, one more day
One more option, one more way
One more question, one more answer
One more line, one more rhyme
One more poem, one more stage
One more of everything and it
Will still all be the same
One more word and it still won't be complete
One more game and I still can't compete
One more try and I'll still experience defeat
One more is just one more
One more life is one more death
One more path is one more test
One more light is one more darkness
One more sound is one more silence
And now I have to take a rest
I've thought a lot and done my best
I've figured out my problem
From my only clue
It is that there is no more me
Just one more of you

-Rich L.

Hopeless Infinity

I know you
You know me
I want you
To let me be

I don't know what you want
I don't know what I need
I don't know anything.

I don't know what you want
I don't know what I need
I don't know anything.

This life is cracked and torn
It's been since I was born
Unsure about my life
I don't know what is right
Content is lost for me
Hopeless infinity!
Hopeless infinity!
Hopeless infinity!

I don't know what you want
I don't know what I need
I don't know anything.

I don't know what you want
I don't know what I need
I don't know anything.

-Mike G.

I Wonder, Wonder Why

I wonder, wonder why God took my grandma
I wonder, wonder why two of my cousins are six feet under
I wonder, wonder why when it rains it thunders
I wonder, wonder why I keep all this pain stuck so under
I wonder, wonder why I did what I did
I wonder, wonder why I robbed them two kids
I wonder, wonder why I got to do this 12-month bid
Didn't the judge know I was just a kid
I wonder, wonder why I feel hurt
But don't cry
So I sit here and wonder why

-Ray G.

Rest In Peace

Lord please forgive me, I've sinned many times—
So I now transfer my aggression into writin' these rhymes—
From all the rebellion to losing my faith—
I laid it all on the line and turned to hate—
I still don't understand why my nana is gone—
Even though my dad tells me it was her time to move on—
I stood and stared at her body peacefully laid at rest—
She died from three diseases, no more, no less—
I wonder if she watches down on me—
And if I am what she'd want me to be—
If not then I truly am sorry—
I'll change soon don't you worry—
When I join you up at them golden gates—
I know nothing but pure ecstasy awaits!
Dedicated To: Nana

-Missy

Getting Caught

When the cops pulled their guns on me, I thought I was dreaming
'Till the next day I woke up and I was barely breathing,
I was in some small room surrounded by white walls,
Then they came in my room and said come get tested,
I looked at him like he was stupid and said, "Get tested?"
He said yeah last night you had gotten arrested
Next day they popped up and said come out for breakfast
When breakfast was over I asked to use the bathroom
He said no bathroom just go back to your damn room
Next day I went to court man I was so happy
When I got to that room they just happened to sentence me.
I was really real mad 'cause they should have released me.
They gave me 6 months out of the whole bid which was 18.
Whatever — I'll be out of here at the age of 15.

-Dontez T.

HIDDEN TREWTH (CONT.)

Lord please forgive me, I've sinned many times—
So I now transfer my aggression
into writin' these rhymes—

Trapped

I'm locked in a cage
Of society's creation
An odd ball in a world
Of my own incarceration
My angels have been cremated
My demons renewed
Alas, I may find
Where this darkness intrudes
Trapped in a cell
Of my own imagination
Here I relive
My recreation
My rights — destroyed
My wrongs — protrude
Alas, I may find
Where lies are made true
All I have for my consumption
Is evil instruction
My time, my mind,
My song gone from reality
In this world – if you will concede
This new me
Will never be freed.

-Rich L.

For around every bend there is something to learn
Only then will I know what's in store.

JARED DURBOROW

Guess what? We got mail from the Department Of Human Services Division Of Juvenile Justice Services in Salt Lake City, Utah. And it was our introspective poet, Jared Durborow. This week he gives us an enormous piece of himself as he works out ideas of if his life is worth changing for the better. If you haven't came to a decision if it's worth it or not, let us give our opinion. Hell yeah, it is. You have so much to offer the world. Your words alone have probably touched more lives than you know. So please keep 'The Book Of Your Life' going because who know what will happen in the coming chapters. As for the rest of you readers, do you think your life is worth it?

My Life, Is It Worth It?

Here my life sits before my eye
Through my happiness I laugh, my sadness I cry
I know my life has gone astray.
Gone off from the proper array.
I wish I had the power.
The power to go back to that hour.
The time when I screwed up.
The time when I spilt my cup.
I will never have that back.
So the only thing to do is change what I lack.
Never again to hurt another.
But treat them all as sister and brother.
So my goal life to do,
Is treating it as life anew.
The change I start now in my life.
Despite any mortal strife.
So as I think here and sit.
I think is it worth it?

My Book Of Life

The future lies before like an open book.
New opportunities show that I've never had.
Let's take a journey and have a look
At the possibilities both good and bad.
Page one I look and I see.
A picture intricate and untold.
People and opportunities as countless as leaves on a tree.
The guidelines are given for my life to mold.
No longer will I be that fish in a bowl.
I turn the page and the world opens before me I take a peek.
And I see the consequences of my actions on another's soul.
As I look around at the world before me I feel like a geek.
The page turns again and it becomes clear.
I won't make it out there alone
For in the world you need more than yourself in the mirror.
I look at the hardships with a moan.
Once again the page I turn.
I see myself grow and find out more
For around every bend there is something to learn
Only then will I know what's in store.
I turn the page once again.
I pick up a pencil and begin to sketch and draw.
The things I find in my future life like beast, women and men.
The world before is like a blank page
So I press forward and clench my jaw.

MOUSY ***We love hearing from people we had in our workshops. We'd prefer to hear that they got out, but hearing from them is a gift in its own nonetheless. This next young man, who goes by the name 'Mousy', writes such a great tribute to his auntie that it brought tears to our eyes. Usually human beings don't know how valuable things are until they've given them away. Well, in temporarily giving away his freedom, Mousy also inadvertently and also temporarily gave away some of his aunt's influence over his life — influence that's much needed. And now he realizes how important she is. It's an epic poem that directly connects his heart to the rest of the world. For he's not just another number, he's a young man with a soul like the rest of us. The word around here is that his auntie's birthday is coming up. And after reading this poem, if anyone deserves a warm Beat Within happy birthday, it's this amazing woman. So, with that said, Happy Birthday Tia. We hope you get to read this because we can tell he put every ounce of his heart into this. And you know better than we do, his heart is enormous. He's currently writing from O.H. Close, a California Youth Authority institution in Stockton, CA. We've heard he's having some problems getting placed in the right location. Hopefully, the Youth Authority will help this young man get the services he needs because we'd hate to see another child gone to waste at the hands of 'quality rehabilitation'. And don't worry, even though it may not sound like much in your current situation, you'll always have a place here at The Beat.***

A Family Portrait

A Family Portrait to a statue
Even when I die I can never forget you
All through thick and thin
You always stayed true
To all my beloved family forever
Know that I love you

I love you forever and forever more
Sunny days, foggy skies, rich or poor
You comfort me in your arms
And with your loving support
You would take a day off of work
Just to see me at court
I know I made mistakes
That caused you so much pain
For I never want to lose you
Or I'll go insane
So please forgive me for my mistakes
And put it to the past
You're more precious than a diamond
And more valuable than cash
Family comes first
So I'm going to put you there
Under any means necessary
I'ma show you I care
I know our family's not perfect
But we've been fighting through this storm
Trying to keep it together
For more generations to form
Never wanting to see the family fall apart
Painting a perfect picture
Like a painting in art
Everyone loves you
For having such a big heart
I love you Tia
And always did from the start

A Family Portrait to a statue
Even when I die I can never forget you
All through thick and thin
You always stayed true
To all my beloved family forever
Know that I love you

When my momma was away
You always welcomed me in your home
Gave me a place to stay
Never leaving me alone
Took advantage of your love
When I fell to the streets
In and out of jail
Missing the holiday treats
Two daughters and a son
Was hard enough for you to handle
Still you welcomed me in your home
While I was giving you a scandal
Hooked me up with a job

A Family Portrait to a statue
Even when I die I can never forget you
All through thick and thin
You always stayed true
To all my beloved family forever
Know that I love you

So I can try to do right
Wanting me to be responsible
But I was always out all night
Partying it up, drinkin' and smokin'
Comin' home drunk
I knew my trust was broken
I know I let you down
And disappointed you hard
If this was just a card game
I'll reshuffle the cards
Starting it all over
To the day I was born
Doing whatever it takes
Not to see your heart get torn
Because you opened my eyes
To what I can honestly be
And showed me the true meaning
Of being a family

A Family Portrait to a statue
Even when I die I can never forget you
All through thick and thin
You always stayed true
To all my beloved family forever
Know that I love you

I remember when I was younger
You would take me everywhere
If you bought shoes for your son
You would buy me the same pair
Every time I got in trouble
You would always back me up
Helped me with my homework
Whenever I was feeling stuck
And when I was on the run
You stayed covering my ass
Called me on my cell phone
Whenever you seen the cops pass
Worrying about me
Not knowing where I go
Thinking "my nephew's crazy
He's getting out of control"
And when I got stuck
You almost lost your mind
You gave me that long talk
I stayed up all night crying
I couldn't bear to see those tears
Falling down your eyes
Knowing those tears were for me
I was stuck with no reply
You got a good son
And two beautiful daughters
Your love is more pure
Than crystal blue water
I got you close to my heart
I stay thinking of you
With love in your presence
My love for you is true

A Family Portrait to a statue
Even When I die I can never forget you
All through thick and thin
You always stayed true
To all my beloved family forever
Know that I love you

INDIO **Because Santa Clara County is more strict with us than other counties, so they have their own Beat Within publication for those who don't know. And it's a shame they can't be a part of 'The Big Beat' because so many excellent writers come out of Santa Clara County. Indio's one of those writers. He's moved on to Glen Mills School in Concordville, Pennsylvania, and he's made our week by telling us some great news. It seems as if this CYA alternative was exactly what he needed, for he's gotten his GED, is certified in carpentry, plans to go to college, and has obviously grown since his workshop days. So often we hear about people glorifying where they're from, or what crimes they've committed, or even who've they've hurt. It's relieving to hear someone glorifying pure productivity in their life. And it sounds like he's having fun doing it. So many people have had their lives destroyed at the hands of the California Youth Authority, so Indio appreciates the blessing of being sent somewhere that can actually prepare him to do well upon his return back into our community. We're proud of all your accomplishments and want you to keep us posted. It's not everyday we here from someone**

The Beat Within

What up Beat? This is Sal aka Indio from Santa Clara County. I'm writing to you guys from the Glen Mills Schools in Pennsylvania, where I am currently placed. I have been here eleven months and am proud to say that I am doing well.

When I was sent away from home in California, I was in the bad graces of the system, for the crime that I was involved in, the charges brought against me, and my 'so-what' attitude towards it. So I fully understood when the blessing of a CYA alternative was bestowed upon me.

In truth, before I was even officially charged, I began to make changes in my way of thinking. I sought something better, more fulfilling. The changes I underwent were not experienced in solitude. You might remember my homeboy Oso, or 'O' from my barrio, he is my closest homeboy, and partner in this evolution of mind. But once I was removed from my familiar environment that 'out of sight, out of mind' effect almost knocked me off track. But just like the persistent shine of any star in the abundance of sky, it eventually came back into view.

Though I wasn't able to do what I originally had in mind, I knew there had to be something I could do to move forward. I couldn't help anybody close to me, but there was somebody I could help, somebody I probably should have began with, and that was myself. Once I realized this, I proceeded to step in forward motion.

Some of the pessimistic people who have judged me during the course of my life, might actually be impressed by the things I have accomplished, and will accomplish by graduation in June. Some, however, will not even be moved to acknowledge this minor success. But seeing as I am content with what I have done, I will put my accomplishments on display for all to see.

The first thing I did up here was earn my 'status,' a required part of the program, that most struggle to get in twice the time that I did. Next, I earned the highest possible executive status (Student Counselor) in my unit, for which I am paid twenty-five dollars a week. Just recently I was hired at the Glen Mills Golf Course, a public course, which will pay me an extra ten dollars added to the twenty-five from S.C., plus tips.

I have recently completed the work required for a basic shop certification in carpentry. I also earned my GED and scored the highest of about a hundred students. I was awarded a seventy-five dollar gift card to a local mall, and like all others who succeeded on the test, was presented a watch. On the ACT (American College Testing) exam I scored a 26, one of the top five scores on campus, and only two points away from a full academic scholarship.

If all goes well, I will walk the stage, and leave here with a high school diploma, a college acceptance letter, a six-thousand dollar a year scholarship, about six-hundred dollars in pocket money, and a one-month early release. But I can honestly say that my most memorable accomplishment is making my family proud...

Ideas Never Die

An idea represents a lot more that what is at face value. It is not just a thought, even though this is where it begins. I am righteously pleased to have come across this information. And I do firmly believe.

I refuse to change in person. I will not pick up and turn my back on the things that hold me back. My neighborhood, my homeboys, other associates, necessities, and things I don't need at all. All of these things made the person who grips this pen. No, I won't erase my lifestyle, or the individual that I have become. I stand tall but never arrogant. But I'll tell you what I will do.

I will allow my ideas to evolve, and mature, along with premature thoughts. Instead of changing my personality and character, I will grow but never forget my past. I won't forget, I will remember, never regretting but always searching for something better.

No contamination will invade my mental stability. Hope fuels my motivation — hope that grows from any success. I succeed when I see smiles on the faces of those I love in pictures, or laughs in their voices on the rare occasion of a phone call. I've made my family proud and that keeps me going. I want to see smiles on the faces of all who believe and search for a better way of living.

My ideas, but do not think for a second that I wish to remembered as a person, because people are forgotten through time, but this idea that I hold, it will never cease to exist 'cause this idea will eternally persist. Ideas never die.

Just A Thought

It's because there is no hope. No, that's not it. They just don't see it. Why do they find satisfaction in the pointless life they lead? How? It's not that they are incapable, I don't, won't, attempt to sympathize with that. There is more to it than that, but yet it is not complicated, on the contrary, it is quite simple. Well I guess that's my opinion.

What is their motivation? Why don't they try? I see people from a couple of years ago, before I went away. And I see them in their same situation. Nothing is new, and unlike antiques, these do not grow better with time. Maybe I should shed a tear, but a tear is meaningless.

Crying is like making a judgment, if nothing is done to help the situation, then it's better left alone. I acknowledge no judgment or criticism unless; the follow-up action is a hand reaching out to help, even if it is just a word of encouragement. I won't cry for them, 'cause in my very own opinion, I might as well laugh. It don't change it either way.

Who can I blame? Is that really the question I wish to voice? No, I don't care who is to blame. All I want to know, is who will extend any kind of support, to help us rise above this all. Life is full of misfortunes, and sometimes it seems like I count them instead of blessings. Though I say this with honesty and sincerity, I do not wish for any sympathy — that, to me, means nothing. Does that make sense?

Listen to me, and please be open minded, but not for one second will I tolerate you attempting to patronize me. That can be taken elsewhere. I know I need help, I give ownership to that. I am not perfect, and will probably never be close to it, but that to me is not help at all.

To strengthen a person, different methods should be used. You or your words are not the keys to my success. In order to help me, you must first seek help to understand how it is that you may help a person like myself.

I myself still am in search of the possible ways to help those in need. But in my situation, first I must situate myself. I have the capability, hope and growing motivation, but here is the question, which persistently gnaws at my righteous mental serenity; stripped of all my qualities, and purposeful, and helpful resources, and hope to be somebody, do I stand alone?

UHURU ***This week we get a dose of spirituality from our soulful physician writing out of the California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, CA. And though his ideas might be controversial for some, we're sure many can benefit from what he's saying. The Beat has mixed feelings about his opinions because though, they are inspiring, they can also be threatening depending on where you sit in life. He makes passionate statements about his religion and everyone is entitled to their own opinion. What we don't agree with is combating oppression with oppressive methods. Sure, there's some sense in not taking a passive stance against certain people who've brought horror and mayhem into our lives. But to group everyone into one category and place judgments on that category that influence how you deal with individuals, that without choice, are a part of that group, is absurd regardless what race is doing it. If one black man did something that brought pain to The Beat, would it be right for The Beat to be combative to all black people? And on the contrary, if one white man did something hurtful to The Beat, would it be wise for The Beat to despise all white people? We feel like in order to fight for equality, you have to first see yourself as equal. If not, then everyone's just battling to be on top, which is impossible because those who are on top are usually there because they're so good at keeping everyone else down. But hey, we love ideas that challenge us. Read on and let us know***

The Beat

Salam Alekum. My name is Everett McCoy. But I go by Uhuru, which is Swahili for freedom. I'm twenty-two years young but feel forty-two.

Growing up my mother was forced to sell her body to feed her children, we were literally homeless, and I used to have to watch my mom's boyfriend beat her up.

My upbringing was devoid of holidays and birthdays because of poverty. I was a very independent child, fed and clothed myself, and helped my mom when she needed me. I was seven/eight during all this.

To summarize, I lived with my dad periodically who was a gangster. A man of great repute in my neighborhood. By age eleven I was smoking weed, having sex and selling rocks. Did I mention I grew up in foster homes/group homes?

By age fifteen I was on the streets alone, no family, no friends — homeless. Basically, I was very sadistic/homicidal because of my impoverished upbringing but, praise be to Allah I never enacted those tendencies. Even today, I can only sit in awe how gracious Allah is because I definitely had the capacity and the thirst to murder serially.

However, one day I punched a guy and when he fell he hit his head and died. By age sixteen I was sentenced to 28 years to life.

Can you sign me up to receive the Beat? Thank you.

We Need Militancy

Salam Alekum: These white people like to shove Martin Luther King Jr. down our throats because Martin King was a pacifist. He believed in non-aggressive resistance.

Malcolm X once said, "White folks don't like for black folks to get involved with anything to do with Civil Rights unless those black people are non-violent, peaceful, forgiving and all that.

These Europeans love to keep us away from strong black leaders like Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Nat Turner, Hannibal, Harriet Tubman, Queen Nzinga, etc. These are the black leaders we need to educate our children about.

We keep poisoning our children with this pacifist attitude letting these white folks indoctrinate us with Martin King semantics! And we facilitate this conspiracy.

Christianity is one of the greatest contributors to black cowardice. Toward the end even Martin Luther King was being forced to reevaluate his principles. He was having great trouble trying to reconcile his Christian values with his sense of civic duty. Traditional Christianity is a ethnic culture — not a God based religion. Strive for the truth and you'll see!

Oppression is a practice that is satanic and goes against every righteous value God has laid out for us. In the Holy Quran Sura 8:39 it says: "And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah altogether and everywhere."

In Sura 4:75-76 it says: "And should you not fight in the cause of Ailah and those who, being weak are ill-treated and oppressed?-Cry is: "Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors..." "Those who believe fight in the cause of Allah, and those who reject faith fight in the cause of evil: so fight against the friends of Satan: Feeble indeed is the cunning of Satan."

Resistance to oppression is a form of obedience to God. Instead of using guns and drugs to destroy our communities we need to reframe our thinking and focus on the real source of our poverty, lack of education, and incarceration: Satan and the Europeans! Satan/Europeans are the source of every great problem. Who can deny this?

They are oppressors/tyrants who care only for their own interests. Human rights and moral obligation means nothing to them.

And if we're going to truly confront him, passive resistance is not going to get us anywhere.

Have you noticed how countries like Amerika never invade countries that have nuclear weapons? Why is this? Because it's a fact of life that, whenever you're confronted by a tyrant force is the only argument that counts. Tyrants use violence and terrorization to meet their goals.

God says in the Holy Quran Sura 8:59-60: "Let not the unbelievers think that they can get the better of the godly. Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into the hearts if the enemies of Allah and your enemies. Whatever you spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid to you, treated unjustly."

To those who treated God's creation with enmity and injustice they are the enemies of God and men.

We need to educate ourselves and start pointing our pistols in the right direction. What we need most is the guidance of Allah. We need to learn kindness, compassion, charity, the power of prayer, and respect.

The only real authority is Allah. The only real constitution is Islamic Law. Let us fight Satan inside of ourselves and outside of ourselves. Oh yeah, we need to love and respect our queens. They're not hoes/prostitutes, they're our mothers/sisters.

Dear Beat Within

I never got to really finish my story about my life. I know I said that I was going to keep it short and simple, but I have been really stressed out lately. Besides I know that you want to hear all about it.

As I stare out my cell window and see Highway 99. I think about my girlfriend and my baby. I'm really worried about my girlfriend Rachel, because she threw her back out yesterday and it's really going to be hard for her to give birth. It's bad enough that birth is painful as it is, but to throw your back out, before you have a child is even more painful.

She is only four months and three weeks, so she still has about four months left. I find out on the 10th of March, if the baby is a boy or a girl. I'm really excited about that. It's just that I really feel bad for my girlfriend, because of the fact that she is going through all that pain, and the fact that I can't be there for the birth. See, I was going to be there for the birth, which is July thirteenth, but now I can't because I am not going to be able to parole in June anymore. Being the fact I have no where to parole to, they won't let me go, so the system is going to make me do the rest of my time and that is September thirteenth. So I figured while I am going to be in here I might as well study up on babies.

I know a lot about babies and young children because of my nieces, nephews, and little cousins. I helped raise my sister's son until he was four years old, my niece since she was three, my two cousins until they were eight years old. I mean it can't hurt to know more about children, since I have one on the way of my own. I'm reading up on a book called, "Caring For Your Baby And Young Child — Birth To Age Five". And there is a lot of interesting things that parents should know.

For instance, the biggest bond you can have with your child, is when they are first born. During the delivery and even when your partner is pregnant with your baby. Your child will automatically know your voice and cling to you at the first touch of birth. It really upsets me that I am not going to be there for all of that. I think that's why I am stressed out like that, but I can only hope for the best and expect the worse. Just try to do my best and support my girlfriend.

BAD LUCK ***We assume that if someone gets locked up when their girlfriend is having their baby, that that person is a dead-beat father. We assume that because a child makes a mistake that lands him in jail, he's horrendous, not salvageable even. But this is someone who will make you think twice about that assumption. Writing from N.A. Chaderjian, one of the Youth Authority's several institutions in Stockton, CA, he's dedicated to get out in a couple months to be there for his child. And to even take it a step further, he's reading on how to be a better father to his child. That sort of persistence is priceless and needed in today's world where the majority of our kids are fatherless. We appreciate your maturity and hope you can continue to be responsible for your child when you're released.***

WILLIAM HAMBY ***We have true philosophers writing for The Beat Within. People who take ideas, question them, analyze them, and come up with their own conclusions regardless of what the majority believes. That's why our publication differs from most. But enough of us tooting our own horns, we're really here to toot the horn of this next writer. A lyrical mastermind, William Hamby hits us with two stellar poems. In his first, 'All That Never Was,' he questions a lot of things — his life in particular. And in his second, a love poem to a girl he doesn't know, you can see his heart yearning for someone to love, someone to love him back, someone he can share the joys and sorrows of the world with. Reading these two poems tells us a lot about this man and that maybe his environment is an incorrect depiction of who he really is. Writing from Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, CA, he gives us something we can't wait to publish, and furthermore, gives us something that has us compelled to hear more.***

All That Never Was

What could have been or what could be
All that I thought or think would become of me
All that never was? Or all that I foresee?
Never will I become "all that never was of me"
As long as I can dream, I gleam
See I been put where my shine stays unseen
What's within remains to be seen
The snakes want me to never be as deep as I mean
And push me 'till I burst at the seams
And lose control of all that "never was" of me
But I'ma say never say never to my lovely forever
And "all that never was" sounds hopeless yet clever
I will hope for, and become much better
Even though my downfall is all y'all endeavor
I'm referring to the ones who say "never"
Still I keep what could have been a "never was" in memory
Yet "all that never was" will be history
And let this future shine bright yet a mystery
So the only thing left behind is "never" and it's misery
All that lies ahead is infinity
Positively, I positively reach for eternity
On this path to the eternal, please learn from me
See if I was "what never was" I would burn you see
Love what you've become and not what you've been
Become love and grace not death and sin
I weave these words from the breath God gave men
See everything I used to be needed saving
I end this with an amen

A Poem To A Girl I Don't Know

Let me say what I wanna,
I'm speaking from the heart without the drama,
Your bright existence
Keeps my love persistent
Constantly we remain in this
Not just "sometimes" but always with "intenseness"
Because being half-way
Is not the language my heart could say?
And this is deeper than forever and a day
Together we stay
Much more better this way
My fire hot as a sauna
This passion flows non-stop like lava
So eternal, I would never desert you
Or crush these feelings or hurt you
You need me just as I deserve you
Do for me and always I'll serve you
Carry away, all your worries today
This love for you is the gift I display
Only to you do I give it away
So sacred, my heart — here take it
Dreams of our souls naked
Like blissful eternal flowers your skin fragrant
As I kiss your lips
I touch this infinite
Forever not just "on and off" again
This emotion is seriousness
Never fall away from this gift,
Without your touch I feel sick
Absence from you is hard to adjust
While apart physically we must trust
Stay by my side till the world is but dust
Non-stop devoted to each other
Not just part-time like passing lovers
Devoted more than sisters and brothers
Or fathers and mothers
Nothing more strong than my love for ya'?
I adore ya'
None after or before ya'
You stay in my mind, never ignore ya'
And my heart bleeds for ya'
Your love intoxicates me even when sober
Infinite this live will never be over
My greatest wish is to hold ya'
Just as you hold my heart and mind
Dreams of you reach out through space and time
Always remember — you're mine

SCORPION ***It is our utmost pleasure to welcome one of our more favorite workshop participants and prolific poets back into freedom, and more specifically, into our office. Anyone who's been reading The Beat in the last year and some change, knows the name Scorpion. Over the last year he's poured his heart out to us on paper, so we were elated to see him free as a bird with a smile that projected his satisfaction. Right away, and true to Scorpion form, he let his presence be known. He started typing, gave great ideas at our topic meeting, and even helped write this issue's editor's note (it's inside the cover, you should check it out). That's the cake, this next poem is the icing on it. As he takes us through a gripping story of when he got out and how he came to be one of the office's newest major players, you can tell that though he's free, there is still that artistic fire that burned in him while he was incarcerated. From Marin to a computer near us, we've had the gratification of watching his potential unfold. And the beautiful thing is we know it's only the beginning.***

Life Anew

It's me Scorpion, and I'm at The Beat
Doing my thing, and my job I'm tryna keep
I walked out of the halls with tears in my eyes
But when I arrived at freedom, all I saw was blue skies
Got into the car and started to sweat
Because for the first time in my life, I was finally getting it
How many months locked up, thirteen?
Had fantasies about spending and smoking that green
The first thing I told my P.O., was "PARTY!"
Planning on celebrating with my friends and Bacardi
When I arrived at home, all I saw was glares
I called out to my friends all I heard was air
To tell you the truth I was actually scared
Then so angry the rage stiffened my hairs
Walking, and walking, losing track of time
So confused my thoughts turned and stopped on a dime
I hated my life, wanted it to end
But I wanted revenge on my so-called friends
I walked to the store and stocked up on drinks
So possessed by my heart, my mind could hardly think
I stayed up the whole night listening to steady beats
The rhythm reproduced by the pounding of my angry feet
As the night grew cold, my heart got colder
As babies cried in the darkness, I got a little bit older
Most of my friends had a place to call "home"
But my life permitted only "cold and alone"
I was to the streets, what lice is to a dog
Doesn't want it around, but its lost in the fog
I hid from the police who knew my name and charge
My conscience died and my nerve was twice as large
I'm lucky I saw no one, but I can't say I wasn't looking
I was so mad; I could feel my skin cooking
After that night I realized what I had to do
I had to move to Frisco to start my life anew
I was on my way, when I saw an old friend
I thought to myself, well, might as well start again
I stayed in a van, and my back hated me with a vengeance
Complaining by cracking louder than fire engines
I bummed money from strangers, and did work for more cash
I was working hard but I wasn't busting my ass
I blew all my money on the herb of the lord
I spent what I had, forget what I could afford
One night at the farmers market, something happened to me
My last friend said, "Don't hang around with me"
He left me in San Rafael with no where to go
Never in my life has my skin been so cold
The next morning I bummed bus fare and went back to Novato with a plan
Fifty cents and a phone number in my hand
I called my grandpa, and poured out my heart
He said I'll be right over, meet me at the park
I then went to live in Frisco away from my problems
If any more arose I would know how to solve them
I needed a job so I thought back to the halls
The Beat Within offered and I might as well call
The next day I called, and my boss answered the phone
Said hello and I said, "This is Scorpion"
He then surprised me by saying "I know you!"
Apparently everybody there had seen what I do
I went in for an interview and that started my new life
Free from people who are angry at their own strife
That is how I came to you now
Whether incarcerated or wondering how
This is how I came to be me
And that's all there is right now, so I ask you to leave

MICHAEL CABRAL ***Every poem and story we publish in this treasure of self-expression is like gold to us. But sometimes we feel we are in the presence of a major talent — poets and writers who are not merely gifted "prison writers" but gifted in any group of writers anywhere. It seems to us that Michael Cabral is in this rarified category, a poet who could be published in the most elite literary magazines in the world. In this poem, "Of A Concrete Embrace," he uses language as a master painter uses color, relying on the richness of English to convey multiple layers of meaning ("Ashamed of my every tier/Shaped to encase my years"). It humbles us to know such talent is encased in this "concrete embrace" — and the fact that this young man has just celebrated his 20th birthday only adds to our sense of wonder at what his natural talent is capable of producing in the future. Michael is currently encased in the concrete embrace known as Pelican Bay State Prison.***

Of A Concrete Embrace

So many stolen dreams
So many broken screams
So may hopeless means
Falling into the arms
Of a concrete embrace

Through the depths of my cries
Roams the breath of demise
Fear and regret despised
And all of my love hidden
Behind see-through panes

Chained to the consequence
Of beginning in the end
Numbered days, numbered men
All lost in the infinite memory
Of never was

Under the guise of con-trol
Watching our futures unfold
So many trials untold
So many sentences
Deceiving our minds

Reign drops and hate dances
With last twos and last chances
Victims of our own antics
Holding fast to a fate
We've never belonged to

Ashamed of my every tier
Shaped to encase my years
Holding me against my fears
Caressing my hopelessness
Forgetting to care

Beings of colorful nightmares
Pieces of false hopes everywhere
Falser smiles when they disappear
Never to be again
We cannot go back now

Celling our lives behind fences
The profits leaving us senseless
Empty and hungry for acceptance
And falling into the arms
Of a concrete embrace

Dear Beat Within

I'm writing you because I would like for you to put this letter in your next issue. Life being locked up in prison is an everyday challenge, being locked away and having other people running your life, not being able to go and come as you please and having people telling you what you can and can't do.

Prison is a place where you have to learn how to take control of your life, and you deal with different attitudes and different personalities. Plus, you have to be very careful that you don't get into a argument or fight because then you have to worry about them taking things away from you, like phone privileges, commissary, rec. and packages.

I had to learn how to survive with the things that surround me in here. I have learned that being away from my family and friends it only made me realize the strength that I have. My family and friends help me stay strong and I know that they are still there for me on the outside of these walls. I may be locked up but still have a mind and can think for myself, that's one thing that prison couldn't take away from me.

Prison is a place where you have to be strong and keep fighting for things to be right and to make it a better place, but not to get comfortable to the point that you go home and come back in two weeks or three months. Since I have to be here I'm going to get everything that the state has to offer me, like going to school, doing different programs and getting the help I need to be a better person than I was before. I've learn how to deal with issues that I had before I got locked up and I don't let anybody rule me because I've become more independent than I was before. I learned so much about how to do research on cases that could help me with my own case.

I've learned so much from being locked up and that is to stay away from trouble because you lose a lot and you don't get the respect if you're a troublemaker. The best thing to do when you're locked up is to stay away from officers that give you a hard way to go and stay away from inmates that like to start trouble. A couple of months ago I sent you two letters and two poems and I asked you to put them in your next issue but you haven't. Please put this letter in your next issue and my two poems. Thank you for the issue you sent me. I got it yesterday in the mail. I'm always glad to get The Beat Within because it's real.

Respectfully Yours,

VALERIE SEELEY

This next 'Victim' of the system drops a bomb on us this week. In her piece Valerie Seeley explains how hard it is to survive in prison and we can't help but acknowledge her strength for having to go through such a thing. And in her letter to us she offers words of inspiration about what makes her time a little bit easier. If you read on, you may see some things she does that could help you. She says she sent us a letter and two poems that we may not have published. We apologize... and we apologize again ahead of time if it happens again. We wish we could be like machines and get everything done the right way, but we're human just like the rest of the world and we're pumping this thing out once a week — not an easy task. But we hear you out and will try to be more efficient next time. She's writing from the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in Bedford Hills, New York. We're hoping our slow turn over as far as publishing Beat Without pieces didn't discourage her to keep us posted.

Victim!

I'm a victim of the system. I'm in a world that's hard to live in, doing time for a domestic violence case, trying my best to hold on to my life. I'm a victim of prison life, trying to survive everyday to keep from drowning. I'm a victim of the system trying to stay alive, trying to stay away from the danger that lies inside these prison walls.

Trying to hold on to my faith and hope that one day this nightmare will soon end. I'm a victim trying not to get lost inside these prison walls, trying my best not to show my fears, I tried not to be scared but I cant help the feeling I have deep down inside of me. I keep asking "God" for strength, guidance and for protection against all the evil things that goes on inside these prison walls. I pray because I'm a victim of pain, hurt, and disrespect of lies that inmates and officers say. A victim of fights that you don't want to get involved with. "Lord" please help me to stay strong and hold my head up. Help me not to be ashamed of something that I tried to avoid. "Lord" please help me not to keep being a victim of the prison system.

ANGELIQUE GUTIERREZ

It's sad when you're suffering from heartache in a place where you're away from the ones you love. But what's even more sad is our inherent need to receive love from someone else. And it's more sad because in times like these, when we need to be focused on ourselves, we're focused on the person we're longing for. However, the only person we can control is ourselves, so in knowing that, it may be wise to whatever it takes to progress regardless if you have a significant other or not. This next young woman, writing from Ventura, the Youth Authority institution for girls in Camarillo, CA, blows us away with her bleeding heart. It bleeds for 'Samuel Delgado' and hopefully it'll eventually bleed for herself. Only time will tell...

Samuel Delgado

You'll never know what you mean to me
What I'd do just to see your face once more.
I don't care about what they say or do
I just want you back in my arms
Why can't you see how much I love you, man!
Take a chance on me and let me show you
That I'm for real. No man will ever take
Your place I never knew love could feel this way
As I sit here in my cell hoping and wishing
One day, one day. I'd get to see your face.

Do I Really?

Do I really want you back?
Do I really need you back?
Well, I want you back, and I feel I need you back
You made me feel loved, special, wanted, and beautiful
You were there no matter what anybody said
I stood by your side no matter if I got hurt
Every time I cried it was from the thought of losing you
Your handsome smile, your soft face, the way you loved me
I should of known it was too good to be true
I was a foolish little girl falling in love so easily
As I sit here lonely, lost and full of pain wondering do I really?

"Lord" please help me to stay strong and hold my head up. Help me not to be ashamed of something that I tried to avoid. "Lord" please help me not to keep being a victim of the prison system.

PAUL JAY REED **We wish we could keep up with Paul Reed's contributions. There are several in our stack the follow this remembrance of a remarkable black woman, his grandmother Muh Dear. Whether one approves of how she managed to survive and keep thirteen children afloat or not, one has to acknowledge that this is an American story that is too often not told, one that is seldom told about race and poverty, and one that though different in detail, is altogether too common. Muh Dear would have been extremely proud of her grandson, whose poem, "A Speck Of Hope," expresses a powerful resilience, and who writes from freedom in Houston, Texas.**

Of the children left behind, my mother was the more devastated. She was nine at the time he departed in 1958.

Memoirs Of A Black Boy:

The Little Old Lady Who Lived In A Shoe

My grandmother, Martha Rose Lavine, gave birth to thirteen children, and of those thirteen, she bore four sets of twins. Her first child, a daughter, was for her husband, Leroy Levine. Her second child, another girl, was the result of an extramarital affair. My mother, Doris Ann, was the third born, and was for Leroy. Muh Dear's fourth born — again a daughter — was also the result of one of her numerous affairs.

Yet she and my grandfather remained together. It was during her sixth pregnancy, with her second set of twins, again the result of an affair, that Leroy abandoned his family. Muh Dear was left with the care of nine children — only four of which were for her husband. In all, she had seven girls and six boys, a baker's dozen.

Of the children left behind, my mother was the more devastated. She was nine at the time he departed in 1958. She had been his favorite child, probably because of her close resemblance to one of his sisters. There was no doubting Doris's paternity. He endeared her with the nickname "Black Hawk," and spent more time cultivating a relationship with her than he did the others. If he gave out money, he usually gave her more. He often took time out with her to play jacks or hopscotch. All of the children believed Leroy to be their biological father. In fact the birth certificates of all Muh Dear's children bear his name, even those who were born years after he left Texas. Only three of the nine not born to him, have an idea who their biological father was. Each, to be sure, has a different father from the others.

Muh Dear never remarried nor did she enter any serious commitments with any one man for long. She was embittered by Leroy's disappearance. He left with no way of contacting him, nor did he attempt to contact her. She taught her children to despise him as a deadbeat father who had walked out on them. Muh Dear was from a matriarchal family and had no problem assuming the role of sole provider. She was a proud woman with only a high school education and no marketable skills. Yet she refused to raise her children on welfare. She worked odd jobs here and there, but her main source of income came from using her natural assets — her beauty and her gift of gab. She hustled.

Muh Dear instinctively preyed on the urges of her male suitors, and lived by the principle, "If you want to play, you've got to pay." Her companionship was not free. Local nightclubs were her playing fields. She could instinctively spot her mark, any heavily drinking, single man (or simply alone), spending big money, looking for company of a beautiful, willing woman. One of her favorite ploys was to sit with her mark and lure him into buying and drinking continual rounds of drinks with her. She would sip at her drink and then excuse herself to the restroom, carrying her drink and pour it out, returning with an empty glass. Upon returning to his table, she'd encourage him to drink up and have a good time. He'd down his (trying to keep up with her) and order another round for the two of them, thinking she too was getting drunk, hoping the effects of alcohol would make her a willing one-night stand. But Muh Dear was a good actress and could feign being drunk.

After getting her date drunk, she — pretending to be drunk also — would allow him to take her to a motel. Anticipating his intoxicated-induced sleep, she would stall him. When he fell asleep, she would empty his pockets and slip out of the room, leaving him penniless and her with a bra full of his money. This not only became her lifestyle, but it also became her primary source of income. This is how she fed, clothed, and sheltered thirteen children without the aide of welfare. To most, including her children, she was an irresponsible alcoholic, single mother with too many children; but, in truth, she was a consummate hustler — deceptive, sick, and intelligent — trying to survive in a world and an era where being black, poor, and a woman wasn't easy.

One particular night she went out with her younger sister, Irene, affectionately known as "Crickett," in hopes of teaching her her craft. Once Muh Dear spotted her mark, she and Crickett eased over to his table. He was a middle-aged white man, well dressed, and looking for a good time. A nice dressed white man in a black club, Muh Dear knew she'd hit the jackpot. His table was in a dark corner, so Muh Dear sat in a chair near a large potted plant. The rounds of drinks started pouring in. With each new round, Muh Dear, unbeknownst to her mark, casually poured out her drink into the plant's pot.

After a barrage of rounds of drinks, the drunk man invited his two beautiful dates to his room. Once in the room, Muh Dear found a way to pick his pockets, taking all he had. She excused herself to the restroom, and signaled to Crickett that it was time for her to find a way to excuse herself, too. Muh Dear slipped out of the bathroom window, and Crickett managed to find her way out. When the man realized he'd just been robbed, he called the police and gave them a description of the two.

Later that night, both sisters were arrested and booked into jail. Both were interrogated and thoroughly searched for the missing $1500, but nothing was found on them.

The two sisters argued back and forth while in custody. "Bitch, look what you done got me into," said Crickett angrily.

"Bitch, if you just keep your mouth shut and play along with me, there ain't shhh they can do to us," came Muh Dear's reply.

"I swear to God, if I make it out of this shhh, I ain't never going anywhere with yo' thievin' ass!" assured Crickett.

"Heifa, shut yo' drunk ass up," the older sister commanded.

Not only was the missing money not found on the two, Muh Dear had managed to sweet talk the detectives into not charging them with a crime. Though the victim had strong political ties, Muh Dear's alluring smile and gift of gab convinced the authorities to release the two suspects.

Once released, on their way home, Crickett asked Muh Dear what had happened to the money. Muh Dear was wearing a trench coat, which the police had thoroughly searched. She began pulling the stitches out of the seam of her coat and out came the money. Muh Dear explained that immediately after jumping out of the bathroom window, she sewed the money inside her coat.

"Where in the hell did you get needle and thread from, Muh?" asked Crickett.

"I always carry what I need to get the job done," said Muh Dear.

Crickett laughingly, jested, "You's a low-down, no good, sneaky, slick, dirty bitch!" as they both hailed a cab home,

continued on next page

PAUL JAY REED (CONT.)

continued from previous page
laughing together.

People felt sorry for Muh Dear. She was like the little old lady who lived in a shoe, with so many children she didn't know what to do. Muh Dear, however, never felt sorry for herself, being both proud and determined. People often donated things to her, items like clothes, food, furniture; but if these items were not up to her standards, she would reject them. She would rather her children to have two or three sets of nice clothes than a wardrobe of rags. To her, being poor didn't mean you couldn't have higher standards. "Don't give me or my children anything you wouldn't wear yo' damn self,' was her slogan. "If it's too raggedy for yo' chillins to wear, it's too raggedy for mine to wear."

People were often attracted to her little ones, and would offer to take a set of twins off her hands to help ease her burdens. Muh Dear would refuse, "Go make yo' own set of twins!" One of Leroy's sisters tried to talk Muh Dear into allowing her to take and raise a set of twins (Jarvin and Darwin), believing she could provide them with a better home in Florida, where she lived. Muh Dear refused to give up her boys. While Muh Dear was away, the sister in-law, took off with the twins, leaving for Florida. When Muh Dear realized the woman had kidnapped her twins, she hustled up enough money and drove from Beaumont, Texas, to the state of Florida to retrieve her boys.

Muh Dear's moral ambiguity may disqualify her for a Nobel Prize, but there's no denying her resourcefulness and relentless will to survive as an independent, single mother with few resources, limited education, and limited chances to move up the social ladder. She was a mother, but she was no Mother Teresa. Call her what you will — pickpocket, con artist, unfaithful, lying whore, or any other name that can be applied to her lifestyle — but she was a survivor who learned how to take advantage in a world that wanted to take advantage of her.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that Muh Dear nor any of her male companions were good role models for her children. Of the thirteen, only two finished school. Six have done time in prison. Ten have abused drugs or alcohol. Three of the girls at one time or another were prostitutes. Five are now dead (two were brutally murdered, twins); and as I write this only three have lived past the age of fifty.

Muh Dear died in 1994 at the age of 65, while living with one of her daughters.

A Speck Of Hope

Despite the mistakes that I've made,
Even all the lies that I've told,
With the karmic depths that I've paid,
Prisons that kept my life on hold —
One speck of hope I embody,
All in all I am somebody.

My friends wrote me off long ago
To family I don't exist,
True love is something I don't know
Self-deprecation, I resist —
One speck of hope I embody,
All in all I am somebody.

Beaten and humiliated,
No self worth, with low self-esteem,
Denied and depreciated,
Useless and worthless, so it seem —
One speck of hope I embody,
All in all I am somebody.

And if I never become rich,
Popular, famous, or well known,
Beg for my meat, live in a ditch,
Miss the goodness others were shown —
One speck of hope I embody,
All in all I am somebody.

I am somebody; this is true.
I no longer care what they say;
I'm living life with this new view,
The night gone — this is a new day —
One speck of hope I embody,
All in all I am somebody.

Call her what you will — pickpocket, con artist, unfaithful, lying whore, or any other name that can be applied to her lifestyle — but she was a survivor who learned how to take advantage in a world that wanted to take advantage of her.

JAMES JOHNSON

A short, but very powerful 'Chronological Listin' Of Life Events,' this O.G. is to be respected around these parts. The piece is short, but it illustrates that he's been through a whole lot. He's writing from Kern Valley State Prison in Delano, CA, and we're hoping to hear more from him because we're tired of hearing 'experts' out here lecturing kids about a lifestyle they know nothing of. It's people like this next writer that we need to take heed to. People who've struggled hard and came out better on the other end. We appreciate the courage it took you to share this with us.

A Chronological Listin' Of Life Events

Born 6-15-65 in San Francisco General Hospital

At 2 years old mother had a nervous breakdown in Sunnydale Housing Projects, taken to Young Guidance Center.

Stayed a ward of the San Francisco court until I was 18 years old. (1983)

Was in over "50" boy's houses and foster homes throughout California. "Was in all the units at SF/YGC, R.U., B.1, B.2, B.3, B.4, and B.5 plus Log Cabin Ranch.

In and out of prison from 1989 to present. "From active substance abuse."

In 1998 committed a robbery and received second-strike 19 years — release date 2013. "San Francisco Courts, 850 Bryant."

Note: I am African American. I have spent my whole incarceration at level four maximum-security facilities because of gang affiliation
Not in a gang on the streets but hung out in the Army St. Housing Projects in San Francisco.

SMILEY ***Writing from N.A. Chaderjian, one of the California Youth Authority's institutions in Stockton, CA, we bring to you a person that strings together ideas elegantly in rhyme. In his first poem, 'Is It Love?' he purposely asks a series of questions, all starting with is it love... And each question he asks, in our opinion, brings the answer no without him actually saying it. So he ends with how anyone else would end a relationship like that, by saying, "Your heart is not what I'm chasing." Then he moves into a poem, we're sure most everyone can relate to. It's about the masks he wears and though it's critical to his survival that he wears them sometimes, he's still him when the mask comes off. And maybe even when the mask is on. But anyway, he concludes with a piece about his family and the things he's going through with them. He challenges them to imagine being in his situation because he knows they probably don't understand how much of a struggle it is. Keep the struggle alive, young poet and we'll keep your words beating through our pages.***

Closed Eyes With Open Arms

Damn my family gots me messed up
To the point that I mentally cry,
Their lives are hella messed up but the
Worst part is that my dad's about to die
It's funny how every time you wanted to
Have me be a part of the family I pushed away
But now that I want to be there for a
Broken family it's your turn to turn away
From the start it seemed that since I was born
I was dying of a broken heart
Then sending my hurt, jealousy, and rage with
Physical and verbal attacks to another's heart
That my momma gets herself into a bad situation
Since I learned to stand I had to watch our
Backs for them people that be chasin'
But as I started to get older
The words I spit became bolder
My heart turned even colder
As I gave everybody the cold shoulder
I burned a lot of bridges and some that
I never, and will never cross,
I glance back in the past the time I've been
Away wasn't for a good cause just a loss
I spent days, even weeks, just contemplating
What my family would do if they were in my situation.

Hidden

Hidden behind a mask,
Wouldn't change if asked
Only a selected few
See the one and only true
Get taken to his land
Anything imaginable is on demand
Anything is what you make it
Just remember you can't take it
A picture of paradise is cool
Refuse the past and you're a fool
Just remember where you came
And how you got your name
Everything is hidden to the naked eye
Until you try to find out why
Your mind holds the key to every door
Just seek knowledge to unlock more
The other mask is the emotion
A compassionate or abuser potion
I never have used this mask before
Just another one I keep hidden behind a door
There are so many that won't get unlocked
With the door hidden behind cement blocks
Even an angel was hidden behind his masks
That's why away he was cast
And if anyone that doesn't know asks
I'm the one hidden behind the masks

Everything is hidden to the naked eye
Until you try to find out why
Your mind holds the key to every door
Just seek knowledge to unlock more

Is It Love?

You know I've been in this game hella long
So a homeboy don't really know what love is,
See I'm a grown man saying that I found it when
It's something else still stuck unloved leaves me pissed
If you know what live is come and try to help
Me understand so I can move on with life,
If not then I'm still surrounded by females of
Every race but questioning on which one can be wife
Is it love when you say that you love me
But when I look away you in my pockets for green
Is it love when you are so skeptical about
Me going to meet people that's in your life,
Damn I ain't even married you and you're ready
To cut me out of the picture with a knife
Am I not up to their standards don't be
Ashamed, tell me what's the deal, what can Smiley do.
Something that you don't know about me is you're
Always with me and if they ask I say it's true.
Is it love when I call you to see how you're doing
But it seems you form an excuse to hang up the phone,
Has me sitting back chillin' while I have all these
Questions formulating in the back of my dome
And it seems these are the first reasons
Why I can't really trust any females,
Please if you can tell me something that is
True so I won't have to believe this tale
Is it love when you take but don't succeed in
Hiding your problems away from each other,
From what I know you should express them
So we can help grow with one another
Most of the time I seen a woman holding in
Her emotions when she exploded she called it quits,
Trust me I seen it happen first hand with my
Mother and father just don't want to end like this
Is it love when I write to you but in
Your responding letter you keep calling me boys
I told you and showed you I'm a grown man
Don't need to be treated like someone else's toy
I mean don't get it twisted I do call you girl
Sometimes but I mainly use love or baby
When I'm with you I'm at a loss for words cause my
Affection for you was just driving me crazy
Is it love when I leave for a year and a half
Come back and find out you was with other guys
Then later on you talk to him literally behind my
Back and when I asked you later on you lied
I know I done some crazy stuff in my life but
Nothing that would come between our relationship,
And just thinking about it, that you could have
Been doing who knows what, makes me feel sick
Is it love or is this just infatuation
Either way your heart is what I'm not chasing

Psychosis

Listen,
My position is precarious as ever
Now embarking on this mission
Toward becoming something better
All around me the surrounding
Negative personas
It's me against the world
And all these other prima donnas
For each and every immature, irrational behavior
I'm physically aware how often
My composure wavers
Belligerence is ignorance
This is the beginning it's
The end that's on my mind
If I'm ever gonna win, well then
I can't be running blind
The equation is as simple
As to die would make me dead
In realizing that these obstacles
Are only in my head.

Nobody

Hello my name is nobody
Are you nobody too?
I'm not from nowhere that I know of
But I've been a place or two
I can't remember no one I know
And no one gives a shit
Nothing changes no place I go
'Cause no one cares a bit
It's not like there's no way to reach me
Just no one takes the time
I'm nothing no-how to put it sweetly
And I've never done just fine
Never know, 'cause you may know me
I may be close to you
And being nobody can be lonely
I'm nobody are you nobody too?

JAY'SIN ***Most of the time we don't know what happens to youngsters that have been in our workshops. They usually get out and forget about us because we are a publication for the incarcerated and who wants to think about being incarcerated after they've finally gotten out. Well, this next writer has not only gotten out, but has went on quite a journey after we'd seen him in Napa and San Francisco County juvenile halls. As a matter of fact, we stopped doing workshops in Napa County juvenile hall a couple of years ago. But man, do we miss the writing. And you'll see why in his letter to us in which he gives us more credit for his chiseled writing skills than we probably deserve. Then he ends with two incredible poems. The first, 'Nobody,' is a proclamation of someone who really needs to be heard. A nobody that's actually somebody. And the second is him playing out the mind games he plays with himself in his head. It's genius just like its creator. If this was a book review, we'd say this next writer is a 'must read.' Oh, and by the way, he's currently writing from the Virginia State Penitentiary in Hampton, Virginia.***

Dear Beat Within

I have so much to say that I don't even begin to know where to start. I've been locked up since January and my contact with anyone on the outside world has been minimal at best. Never mind anyone who cares, or has the time to listen. So I suppose I'll kick it off with a little about myself and how I came to be writing this letter.

My name is Jason, I'm 21, and I'm from Vallejo, California, born and raised. To be specific I'm from a little spot called American Canyon right in between Vallejo and Napa. As you well know growing up in "The Bay" was some crazy shhh for a kid in the 80's and 90's and in my early teen years I tended to steer toward all the rough crowds and drugs and alcohol.

Needless to say I started getting in trouble real early and in April of '98 I found myself in Napa County Juvenile Hall. For the next year I was in and out, bouncing around to homes and group homes all over the bay from Frisco to San Jo, eventually to a camp, and then in August. I was sentenced to 7 and a half years in YA by a judge who was tired of seeing my face.

During that whole time going in and out I went to a few of your workshops first in Napa County and then a final one in YGC on my way back to YA for a parole violation after just doing 2 years. I did another year on that violation and decided it was time for me to make some serious changes — enough with the gangbanging, enough with the drugs, enough with doin' time shhh, all because my name was down in the Cali system as a habitual offender.

I was 18 by then so I moved across the country to Virginia, did 6 months on probation out here, and bada-bing, bada-boom, my juvenile record was closed, done and over with. I simply had to make the decision to grow up and make some changes, both in my surroundings and in my ways of thinking. I got stories for days about that period in my life, but I suppose for now I'll spare y'all, after all I'm gonna have plenty of time to share that with The Beat as the weeks progress.

So about that... aahhh you're now sitting there asking, "If he made all these changes and was doing so well, why is he writing from a county jail?" Well that's a good question. I suppose the answer isn't so simple. Although I've done everything necessary to get out of the system and stay out of trouble for the past 3 years, there's been this "growing up" thing I've been struggling with. I don't care what they tell you, there's no class on that in YA. You gotta do that on your own. Everyone does. You gotta find your groove in life and stick with it. Again, the past 3 years has been one helluva ride as well but I'll save the details for later dates, as I wanna bring us up to date as to how I've come to this point in this crazy life of mine.

Like I said, when I got off probation. I was done. No more getting arrested all the time, no more having to answer to the system, I was my own man. Though at times there have been close calls, I've kept a low profile and kept my name clean. That was until last year on July 4th. After coming back into town from camping, I called up some friends and found out there had just been an incident involving a very young friend of mine (he was 15) being assaulted with a weapon by a very grown man in his mid-thirties. I guess I never did master that anger issue, or perhaps some would say the man deserved every bit of what I did to him for beating on a child. To go ahead and skip the "War-Dog," I will now be doing 4 years in a VA State Pen on my first adult conviction.

The crazy thing is they never did find out about my juvenile history either. They just don't play out here on the East Coast. Now, I'm awaiting transfer to one of Virginia's State Facilities where I suppose I'll write and share the whole experience with The Beat. That is if, you'd like to hear it. Either way, I've become something of a poet and a writer since my days in those workshops with The Beat. And besides, y'all are the only ones I have to share my writings with for the duration, or so it seems at the moment. You know how it goes when you get locked up, all those so called friends have better things to do than write you, come visit, or even answer a phone call. And at my age I don't really have a family, they all have lives of their own. Anyway, enough with the sob stories, let's move on with life right? As they say, "It's all water under the bridge."

For the sake of what's to come in the next few years, I'd just like to say to all those at The Beat, it's quite refreshing and a huge relief to have y'all as an outlet. I hope you enjoy my writing as much as I enjoy partaking in any artistic activity. It can even be said that those long ago workshops with The Beat played a major part in me becoming the poet I am today. Most likely my very first attempts at poetry when I was a 13 year old boy, was when I sat in your workshops in Napa County, since then I've gone on to writing many, many works.

I'm including a couple in this entry, and perhaps if y'all like 'em, I'd be obliged to keep 'em coming. Once again, and I'll never say it enough, thank you so much for being such support to incarcerated folks like us, young and old. Hope to hear from you soon, anyone can feel free to write me, readers and editors alike, post this letter along with address if you'd like. Keep it real, much respect.

Who can I blame? Is that really the question I wish to voice? No, I don't care who is to blame. All I want to know, is who will extend any kind of support, to help us rise above this all. Life is full of misfortunes, and sometimes it seems like I count them instead of blessings. Though I say this with honesty and sincerity, I do not wish for any sympathy —— that, to me, means nothing. Does that make sense?

check out the rest of Indio's BWO piece on page 51